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# THE PROPHETS OF THE EAST

SHORT BIOGRAPHIES OF BUDDHA,  
CHRIST AND MUHAMMAD

DIWAN CHAND SHARMA



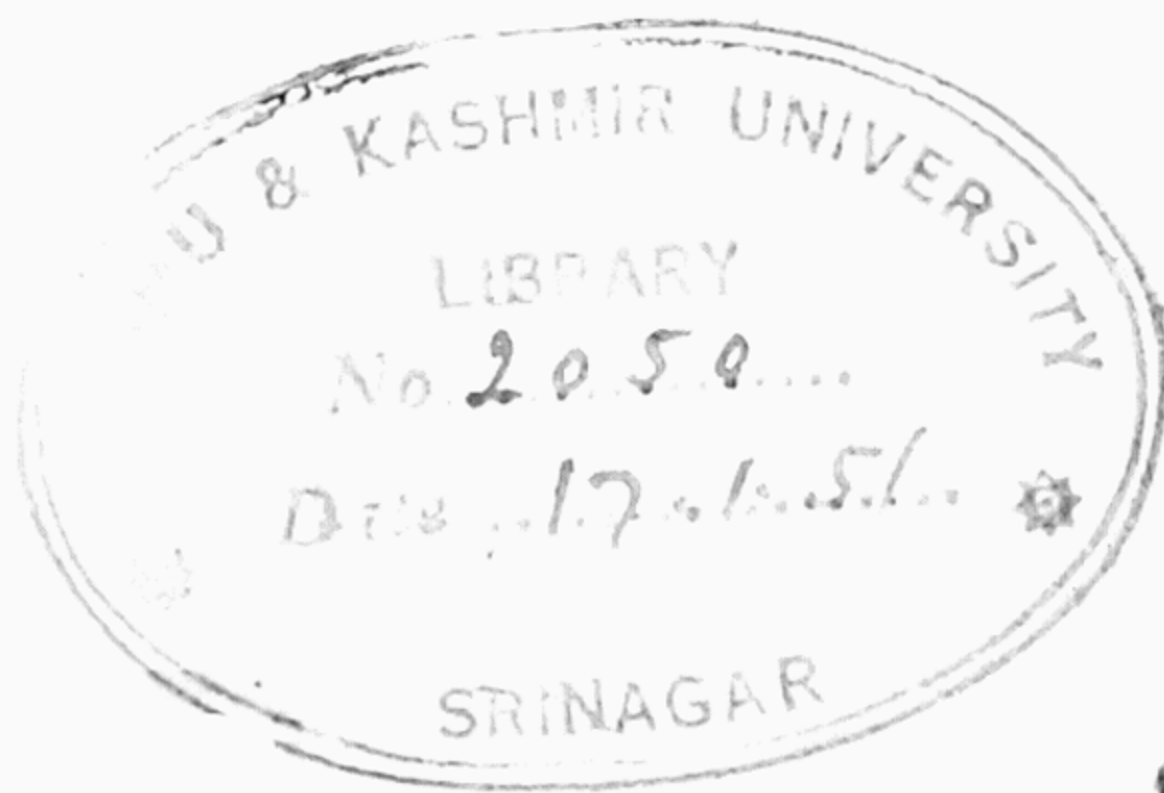
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BY  
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## PREFACE

MY SOLE PURPOSE in writing this book has been to show to my readers what kind of beings these prophets were, whose teachings direct the lives of millions of men and influence their conduct and thoughts. Though a simple-minded Hindu myself, I have derived much valuable inspiration from the shining record of their noble and unselfish lives and hope the readers of this book will experience the same quickening influence for good.

More than anything else, I feel this book will be conducive to a better understanding between the different communities that inhabit India. By enabling its readers to understand the founders of three great religions of the world, it will enable them to understand the people who follow in the footsteps of these prophets. Such an understanding is bound to dispel those prejudices which are born of ignorance. The result will be sympathy and tolerance and a deeper comprehension of the essentials and unity of life.

It is needless to say that the book has been written in very simple English so that readers of all ages, but especially the young, will find it interesting as well as instructive reading.

I am indebted to my friends, Prof. R. R. Kumaria, M.A., of the Central Training College, Lahore, Sheikh Akbar Ali, M.A., LL.B. and F. K. Khan Durrani, B.A., for reading through the manuscript and making valuable suggestions.

*August 11th, 1935.*

D. C. S.



These disputes were usually due to very trivial causes, but the consequences were very often disastrous. A word of scorn spoken at a poetical contest, a gesture of contempt during a horse-race, or a mere brawl in a street, would incite people to warfare and result in the deaths of many men. These feuds were handed down from one generation to another, and sometimes whole tribes were wiped out in these wars. The Arabs frankly believed that might was right and did not think that bloodshed and plunder were at all wrong.

In social matters the Arabs were very backward. Most of them were nomads, that is, they did not stay in one place, but wandered wherever they could find water to drink and fodder for their cattle, and at such places they pitched their camel-hair tents. Women occupied a very lowly position, and were regarded as an item of property, which could be inherited like lands and cattle. For this reason a woman had no share in the property of her husband or her father, and at her husband's death the heir could dispose of her in any way he liked. Sometimes he would marry her himself, or give her in marriage to someone else. She could be divorced on the slightest pretext, not once only, but many times. Polygamy was practised by the Arabs, and a man could take as many wives as he pleased.

The Arabs had no regard for women, and looked upon them merely as objects of pleasure. The birth of a daughter was not a welcome event in a household. Nevertheless, woman inspired Arab poets, and even though they did not have a very high conception of her character, they sang of her physical charms and beauty.

Besides their love of sport and fighting, the Arabs were fond of drinking and gambling. They drank large quantities of wine, especially on holidays and on the occasion of festivals and fairs. Gambling was regarded as an ordinary

# BUDDHA

LONG, LONG AGO, India was divided into many small kingdoms each of which was ruled over by a king. One of these kingdoms was that of the Sakyas, which was situated on the borders of Nepal. It was a very beautiful and picturesque land, watered by many rivers and bounded by the lofty and snowy peaks of the Himalayas. The country was fertile, and rice grew in abundance, but large tracts of it were covered with forests, and there were many groves of fruit trees. The story of the origin of this kingdom is very interesting.

In days gone by there was a king who reigned over a country called Potala. He fell in love with a princess of rare beauty and charm, but she would not marry him unless he promised to make the youngest son his successor to the throne. The king agreed to do this, so he married the princess and they had five sons. When the youngest son grew up, she reminded the king of his promise. True to his word, the king banished his four elder sons and placed the youngest on the throne. These four brothers, therefore, left their father's kingdom and went to seek their fortune elsewhere. After a long and tedious journey, they came to a fertile land which they liked very much. There, on the advice of a wise hermit named Kapila, they made up their minds to stay for ever. After some time they built a magnificent city which they called Kapilavasthu, after the sage. The brothers themselves came to be known as the Sakyas, which means daring or enterprising.

Very little is known about the early Sakya kings, but we know a great deal about King Suddhodana who claimed



to be a descendant of these four brothers. As a king he was very famous and his subjects were devoted to him. He ruled over a contented and prosperous kingdom, which made him very happy; the only thing which grieved him was the lack of an heir to the throne. Even though he had married the two sisters Maya and Pajapati, daughters of the King of Koli, no son had yet been born to them.

But one night Queen Maya had a dream, in which the birth of a son was foretold to her. When the king was told of it he sent immediately for learned Brahmins and scholars who could interpret the dream. They all said with one voice that the queen would have a son, and that the child would grow up and play a great part in the history of the world. They said also that if he stayed in the palace he would become a mighty conqueror and a famous king, whose conquests would be one of the wonders of the world and whose subjects would number millions of people; but if he renounced the world he would become a great sage who would guide people in the path of truth and goodness.

The dream came true and a son was born to Queen Maya. This filled the heart of every Sakya with joy and great festivities were held throughout the land. It is said that even nature seemed to rejoice at the birth of the child; for cool breezes blew everywhere and a bright light flooded the whole earth. But all these festivities came to an abrupt end, for Queen Maya died seven days after the birth of her son. The child was left to the care of Pajapati, the second queen, and she looked after him with all the natural tenderness and affectionate care of a real mother. He was named Siddhartha soon after his birth, and as he grew up the beauty of his person and the gentleness and charm of his manner won all hearts. The king was filled with pride for his son, but



sometimes he felt anxious about his future. 'What will happen if he forsakes the world?' he often asked himself. He thought over this question for a long time and came to the conclusion that everything possible should be done to make the prince love the world and its ways. He was surrounded with all kinds of luxury and nothing sad or ugly was allowed to come near him. Beautiful maid-servants waited on him during the day, and a host of male servants were always ready to obey his orders.

When the prince was five years old, he was sent to a school kept by an old, wise and learned Brahmin. There he was taught, with other Sakya children, and no difference was made between him and the other boys. Soon, however, it became evident to the teacher that the prince was cleverer than any of the other pupils. He was not merely fond of his books, but distinguished himself also in feats of strength and other manly exercises. He could manage elephants in a way which no one else could, and he learnt to shoot with his bow and arrow with unerring aim.

At school Siddhartha became very friendly with three of his class-mates. They were his half-brother Nanda, his cousin Devadatta and a Brahmin lad named Udayin. Devadatta, however, was jealous of the prince who was very fond of Udayin and spent a great deal of time in his company. But Devadatta did not want anyone to admire the prince and to think well of him, so whenever the chance presented itself, he was always trying to make mischief. It was very foolish to be so jealous, and an event which took place showed very clearly the contrast between the noble prince and the ill-tempered and insolent Devadatta. One evening the prince was passing through his royal gardens when he saw a flock of wild geese flying overhead. He drew the attention of his friend Udayin to



this, and he, too, felt very happy, as together they watched the graceful flight of the birds. The next moment they heard a piercing, mournful cry and saw one of the birds fall at their feet wounded with an arrow. When Siddhartha saw the wounded bird his heart was filled with pity for it, and picking up the bird, he pulled out the arrow, and dressed the wound.

Siddhartha was wondering who had shot the arrow, when a messenger from Devadatta arrived and said that his master wanted the bird. He realised that it was Devadatta who had shot the bird; so he refused to give it up, and the messenger had to return disappointed.

Thereupon Devadatta came himself, and in an imperious tone demanded the bird from the prince. But Siddhartha replied, 'I cannot give the bird to you because it does not belong to you. I will keep it with me and tend it carefully and lovingly. You should remember that the bird belongs to me because I have tried to save its life and not to you who tried to kill it.' This talk irritated Devadatta very much, and he said, 'How well you know how to preach! This is not worthy of a prince. A prince should have other virtues. He should be able to hold his own in a duel or in a combat or be able to lead his soldiers in battle.' Siddhartha paid no heed to his taunts and refused to deliver the bird to him, so Devadatta went away swearing eternal enmity against him. When others heard of this dispute they warned the prince against the evil designs of the scheming Devadatta. But the prince was not afraid of such threats, and his only thought at that time was for the bird. He tended it very carefully and after a short time it got well and the prince was very pleased. Then he let it fly away to enjoy the freedom of the woods and the sky.

The king was quite aware that his son's mind was



inclined towards self-sacrifice and the service of others rather than towards the enjoyment of luxury and the pleasures of life. Nevertheless he tried to surround him with every comfort so that he might prevent him from leaving home. He had three beautiful palaces built for him; each of which was suited for a particular season of the year. For instance, there was the summer palace which was built so as to give protection from the oppressive heat. It was situated in the midst of a garden which contained cool and shady trees. Its floors were paved with marble and its terraces were open and airy. The winter palace was built so as to lessen the rigours of the severe Himalayan cold. On the floor were spread fine carpets and warm rugs and the walls were covered with wood. The palace for the rainy season was designed in such a way that it kept out the damp. The prince spent his time in these palaces forgetful of the cares of state and unmindful of the pains and sufferings of mankind. Around him he saw things of great beauty and he could always spend his time listening to delightful music.

The king then decided that only one other thing was necessary to make the happiness of his son complete. This was a happy marriage; so messengers were sent far and wide to bring particulars of all the girls of marriageable age in the Sakya clan. When they had all returned it was found that the Princess Yasodhara was by common consent the most suitable bride for the prince. In addition to her beauty she was very intelligent, and had charming manners. She was very good and kind, and was beloved by everybody; so the marriage was soon arranged. At that time Kapilavasthu wore a gay and festive appearance, and everybody took part in the long round of festivities which were held to celebrate the wedding. Siddhartha himself was pleased with his charming wife and both of them lived



together in the magnificent palace which the king had built for his son.

The heart of the old king was filled with joy to see his son really enjoying himself. But the other Sakya lords disapproved of the prince taking such an interest in the pleasures of life, and said that it was not worthy of anyone whose duty it was to rule over men. They said, 'What can this prince, who is always intent upon pleasure and surrounded by luxury, do for the welfare of his subjects? If famine broke out he would not be able to give up any of his luxuries. If war was declared against some rival clan he would not be ready to lead his armies into battle. He will be unable to appease our gods because he has never learnt to worship them.'

All these fears and doubts of the chiefs reached the ears of the king. He realised the force of their arguments and made up his mind to tell the prince about it. When the prince was told, he said that he would compete with the bravest archers and fencers in the kingdom and would show the chiefs what he could do. The king welcomed this suggestion and fixed a day for the tournament. It attracted crowds of spectators and a large number of competitors. The former were eager to see the skill of the bravest in the land and the latter were anxious to distinguish themselves. Every competitor thought himself superior to all the rest and regarded the prince as a man who was a weakling and only fond of pleasure. No one was more sure of the prize than Devadatta, who considered himself to be the best shot in the land. Nanda was equally hopeful of success because no man could wield a sword as well as he could.

Nobody could understand why the prince had decided to take part in an event of this kind. When the contest began everyone was surprised at the strength and skill of the prince. He beat Devadatta in the use of the bow and arrow,



and in swordsmanship Nanda was no match for him. After this came the supreme test of strength and skill; they were all asked to string the bow which the prince's grandfather had once used, and after his death had been hung on the temple wall as something which was beyond the strength and skill of any other human being. Each competitor made the attempt, but not one was successful. Then came the turn of the prince, and to the delight of everybody he succeeded in stringing it. The people were overcome with joy, for they felt that the prince was really a worthy person and would make one of the best and the bravest of rulers.

After this the prince lived a gay and carefree life, devoted to pleasure and did not take his responsibilities as a ruler very seriously. His father was pleased at this, for he knew that his son was interested only in the affairs of the world. He even prided himself on the fact that he had succeeded in impressing upon his son's mind the joy, beauty and glory of this life. 'Now,' said he to himself, 'there is no chance of his renouncing the world, for he loves it so well. He is sure to make a great king after my death. I hope his fame as a ruler will spread far and wide and he will be looked upon as one of the greatest emperors that the world has ever known.'

But the king had not understood his son rightly. Beneath the youthful gaiety of the prince many serious purposes lay hidden. He was not so worldly minded as his father had thought; neither was he so keen on the pleasures of life. On the contrary his mind was filled with doubt as to the nature of life and death. Many a time he asked himself what was the purpose of this life. Was he born merely to marry and to have children? Was it the highest aim of his life that he should become a famous ruler and extend the boundaries of his kingdom? None of these things completely satisfied his mind. On the other hand, he was beginning to realise that he had been born to serve



mankind, though as yet he did not know in what way he could do this. Surrounded as he had always been by luxury, he had not yet known either sorrow, sickness or death. Wherever he looked he had seen only beautiful things. Even when he drove through the city all things that were ugly or painful had been carefully hidden so that he should not see them. The world seemed to him to be a garden full of lovely roses, but he was soon to learn that roses had thorns.

In course of time the prince Siddhartha became acquainted with the more serious side of life, and how this happened makes a most interesting story. At some distance from the palace there were some magnificent gardens. These gardens were a dream of joy and beauty, for they contained trees, laden with fragrant flowers and soft, fresh juicy fruits, which afforded shelter from the sultry heat of the midday sun. In the centre of the gardens there was a lake of pure and clear water on which grew many beautiful lotus flowers. One evening the prince sent for his faithful charioteer Channa and told him to drive him to the gardens. The charioteer made ready the gilded chariot which was drawn by four white horses. The prince mounted the chariot, and all along the route to the gardens the people stood up and greeted the prince with cheers. He was very pleased to see them for they appeared to be contented and happy.

When they were not very far from the gardens, the charioteer suddenly stopped the horses to avoid running over an old man who was crossing the road. When the prince asked the charioteer why he had stopped the chariot so suddenly he pointed to the old man. When Siddhartha saw him he was filled with amazement for he had never seen anyone like him before. The old man was weak and feeble; he looked very miserable. His eyes had lost their brightness and the hair on his head was scanty and white.



To support his weak body he carried a staff in his hand and from every passer-by he asked alms. The prince shrank back in horror and amazement just as a man would if he saw a poisonous snake in his path, and asked the charioteer why the man was so different from others he had seen. He also asked him why there was so much misery and sorrow written on his face.

'Prince,' replied Channa, 'there is nothing strange about this man. He is like many other old men. It is indeed a pitiable condition to which old age reduces us all. There was a time when he was young and strong but now old age has robbed him of all his strength and joy in life.

    'Youth is full of pleasance,  
        Age is full of care;  
    Youth like summer morn,  
        Age like winter weather;  
    Youth like summer brave,  
        Age like winter bare.  
    Youth is full of sport,  
        Age's breath is short;  
    Youth is nimble, age is lame;  
        Youth is hot and bold,  
        Age is weak and cold;  
    Youth is wild, and age is tame.'

'One thing is certain and that is that all of us will one day be like this man. We must all become weak and decrepit as he is.'

All this gave a rude shock to this self-satisfied and happy prince. He felt as if life had lost much of its interest for him. 'If this is the end of human life,' he said to himself, 'it is not worth living.' So he ordered the charioteer to drive him back to the palace, as he had no desire to see the gardens after what had occurred. When the king saw the prince returning earlier than he was expected, he enquired



what had happened, and was told what the prince had seen and how thoughtful and sad he had become. The king himself was very troubled for he knew that such things might induce the prince to renounce the world. In the hope that the prince might forget what he had seen, the king gave orders for a banquet to be held which was followed by singing and dancing. This had the effect which was desired, and for a short time the prince forgot the incident.

After a few days he again decided to visit the royal gardens, so the chariot was ordered to be brought and the prince drove in it. He had not gone very far when he saw a depressing sight, a man lying in the road groaning and writhing with pain. The prince was greatly moved by the distressing groans and cries of the man and he asked Channa what it all meant.

‘He is smitten with sickness, my prince,’ replied Channa, ‘and sickness comes at some time or other to all of us. It is a terrible thing to fall ill and lose the use of our faculties and the enjoyment of things around us. Yet such is life and we cannot help it. It may come upon us at any moment, and strike us down.’

All this distressed the prince very much and he became very thoughtful. He told the charioteer to drive him back to the palace, and on the way he thought how fleeting are the pleasures of this world and how pain and suffering are the common lot of all. Some days went by and the people were surprised that the prince was less cheerful than he had been formerly. How could he be cheerful when his mind was full of the misery of life and death, the cause of suffering and pain and the unhappy lot of all mortals? In course of time, however, the fit of depression wore off and the prince decided to visit the pleasure garden again; so he ordered the charioteer to drive him there. They had gone only a very short distance when they saw on a bier a dead



body which was being taken to the cremation grounds. It was a heart-rending sight, for the cries of distress and the wails of lamentation which went up from the men, women and children that followed the dead body were enough to convince anyone of the shortness of this life and the grim power of death. The women especially were a most pathetic sight, for in their agony they tore their hair and beat their breasts. The men felt their grief no less keenly but they bore it more bravely.

‘What is all this ?’ cried the prince. ‘Such a sight I have never seen before. It has made me so sad.’

‘That is a dead body,’ said the charioteer, ‘which they are taking to the cremation grounds. There it will be burnt and nothing will be left of it but ashes. Such is the lot of mortals. They are born, they live for a span of a few years and then they die. After their death they are burnt or buried and then forgotten.’

All this made the prince reflect on the vanity of human life, and once again he became very depressed. When he had again somewhat recovered from his depression, he set off once more in his chariot for the gardens and he had not gone very far when he noticed a man the like of whom he had never seen before. He wore a long flowing robe of orange colour but he was bare-footed and bare-headed. His hair and beard were shaved and a small bag which contained some scraps of food which he had begged was slung over his shoulders. Though he looked poor and destitute and devoid of any of the comfort and luxury which worldly people enjoy, yet he seemed to be contented and happy. His face wore a peaceful expression and his eyes seemed to glow with the light of knowledge and truth.

‘Who is he ?’ asked the prince of the charioteer.

‘He is a Sanyasi,’ replied the charioteer, ‘who has renounced the world. He does not live for himself but for God



and mankind. He does not seek comfort or pleasure but truth. He is a seeker after truth.' These words impressed the prince very much and he resolved to be a seeker after truth. Henceforth the joys of this world lost all their attraction for him. The beauties of nature began to pall on him and he seemed to lose interest in everything. He took no pleasure in his magnificent robes, his bejewelled turbans or his perfumes and ointments. He saw through the mockery of this life, and the glittering attractions of this world appealed to him no longer.

At this very time the news was brought that a son was born to him. Under ordinary circumstances his heart would have filled with joy to hear such news but now it gave him no pleasure. On the other hand, he exclaimed, 'It is Rahula,' which means impediment. What he meant to say was that the birth of his son was in no way an unmixed blessing, but rather it was an impediment, for because of it he would find it very hard to break away from his home and his wife. When the king was told what the prince had said, he gave his grandson the name, Rahula.

That evening when the prince went back to his palace he felt very ill at ease. His heart was torn between two things, love of his home and love of God, and he did not know what to do. But the citizens were in a different frame of mind and wanted to celebrate the occasion with joy and merrymaking. When the prince drove through the streets of the town they all stood on the house-tops to greet him. It is said that during the progress of the prince through the city a little girl sang a song in which she congratulated him on his good luck in having a successor to the throne. She said that he was indeed blessed for he had such a beautiful son. The prince was so charmed with this song that he gave the girl a pearl necklace, although his thoughts really were far away. He seemed to say to himself, 'Blessed is



not he who has money with which to live in comfort and children to continue his line, but he who overcomes the miseries of this life and seeks peace in the contemplation of truth.'

That night the king gave a banquet to which all the high officials of the State and the leading citizens were invited. The guests assembled and partook of the banquet to the accompaniment of delightful music played by beautiful women. But the prince had lost all desire for this kind of amusement, and he soon became weary of it, and went to sleep with his limbs tired, his heart sick and his mind disturbed.

He did not sleep very long, for the sights that he had seen came continually to his mind and he could not help thinking about them. At midnight he got up and called Channa. He ordered him to saddle a horse for he wanted to leave his home, and Channa said that he would obey his orders without any delay. But just then, a wave of fatherly affection came over Siddhartha and he felt a strong desire to have a look at his child. He went therefore to the nursery, and the sight which met his eyes, almost broke his resolve for a while. There his wife lay asleep, on a bed of flowers with her hand resting on the baby's head; and the tender infant was also sleeping in all his innocent beauty. 'How can I leave them?' he asked himself. 'Has not my wife been dear and faithful to me? Is not this child my own and is it not my duty to love him and bring him up properly?' But he soon drove these thoughts from his mind and after taking one last look at his wife and son, he went out to the palace gate. There he found his favourite horse and mounting it he rode away.

At that time the full moon was shining in the sky and everything was quite peaceful. The prince passed through the streets of the city and their silence at that hour presen-



ted a strange contrast to the noise and bustle of the daytime. When he reached the outer gate of the city he was pleased to find it open and the guards fast asleep. Then, followed only by his faithful charioteer, he rode on till he came to the banks of the river Anoma. On the way the Tempter tried to lure him back to his home. He said, 'Go back, prince, and within seven days I will give you all the kingdoms of the earth.' But the prince was proof against all such temptations, for his heart was set on the quest of truth.

On the banks of the river the sands were cold and glistened beneath the first rays of the sun. The prince dismounted and took off all his royal robes and ornaments, and with his sword he cut off his long, beautiful hair. At that moment a beggar in rags passed by, so he borrowed his clothes, saying, 'These are the clothes which are fit for me.' He told Channa to go back and tell his people of the great adventure which he had undertaken in the quest for truth, but Channa wept and said that he would not forsake his master. The prince was unwilling to agree to this, and so Channa had to go home, feeling very sore at heart.

Thus did the prince achieve the great renunciation. There he stood on the bank of the river as a meanly-dressed beggar, having turned his back upon his home, his kingdom, his wealth, his wife and his child.

The prince did not wish to live within the boundaries of his own kingdom, so he turned his footsteps towards Rajagriha, the capital of the Magadha kingdom. There with a begging bowl in his hand he went from one house to another, collecting scraps of coarse food to satisfy his hunger. While doing so he was seen by Bimbisara, king of Magadha, who was struck with his handsome and noble appearance and his princely bearing. So interested was



he that he went up to Siddhartha and wanted to know everything about him. He even offered to provide him with all the comforts and luxuries of life if these could make life worth while. But Siddhartha said, 'You don't understand me, O noble King. I do not beg because of necessity but because I have renounced the world. I am of royal descent and my father rules a Sakya kingdom, but I have seen the uselessness of all earthly glory and know that wealth cannot buy happiness; I have, therefore, resolved to follow the path of virtue and truth.'

'What a noble resolve you have made,' said the king. 'So please come and teach me what you have learnt through your religious exercises.' Siddhartha said that he would do so as soon as he felt competent.

At Rajagriha Gautama, as he now came to be known, lived in a solitary cave far from the city because he knew that life in the city would not be suitable for contemplation. At this time he came under the influence of a saint, but his teachings brought him no peace of mind. He felt that ceremonies and sacrifices were not of much use in search for truth, and that, however much he practised them, he was bound to remain ignorant.

Gautama then left Rajagriha and went to the forest of Uruvela, where wild beasts roamed at large and there was danger to life on every hand. He was not afraid, so he made his abode there and began to practise fasts and penance to such an extent that his health failed altogether. He was reduced to a mere skeleton and had frequent fainting fits, but still he pursued his object with grim determination. One day, however, he realised that it was as useless to seek truth by this means as it was to search for water in the desert. He began, therefore, to take food again and regained his former strength.

But his search was not yet finished. He moved from



one part of the forest to another, and finally came to a peepul tree whose branches spread far and wide. The tree had stood there for many years and its shade was so pleasant and refreshing that Gautama sat under it determined to find out the truth for which he had left his home. Said he to himself, 'I will not leave this place till I attain that peace of mind to know which I have been trying all these years.' He sat, therefore, on the ground at the foot of the old tree, with his mind absorbed in the one great purpose of his life. He was quite unconscious of what was going on around him and the beauty of the rising sun, the gorgeous colours of the sunset, the river flowing near him, the noises of the wild beasts and the sweet song of the birds, none of these things had the least influence on him. He was indifferent alike to the pangs of hunger and the pain of unsatisfied thirst. With his eyes closed and his ears deaf to all sounds without, he sat calm and undisturbed.

His mind was disturbed by all kinds of doubts and fears. Sometimes his resolution seemed to give way and he thought that the whole struggle was useless. At that time the Evil One seemed to whisper strange and disquieting thoughts to him. Sometimes he thought of his royal descent and the privileges and pleasures of kingship which he had left behind. Sometimes he remembered his devoted wife and his only son. A great longing came over him to see them again. He even thought of his father weighed down by age and pining for the return of his son, to whom he would hand over the responsibilities of his kingdom. He felt he would like to see him and asked himself if it were not his duty to relieve him of the burdens of State. He thought of his subjects who, if they saw him return, would receive him with shouts of joy. Should he not go back to them and by his wise and benign rule make them contented and

happy. He even despised himself for wearing the soiled and threadbare clothes of a beggar and for putting off the silken robes of a prince. He felt as if the clothes he was wearing chafed his tender flesh and set his nerves on edge. Then he recalled to mind the duties of a warrior. A warrior, he remembered, should fight and win an empire for himself and not waste time in idle contemplation.

But these thoughts did not last long, for, by an effort of will he was able to drive them away and become calm and self-possessed again. The old legends, however, show that this internal struggle was nothing compared to the troubles he had to suffer at the hands of the Evil Spirits who, at the instigation of the Evil One did everything they could to try to turn him from his great purpose. It is said that the forest was set on fire in order to make the prince flee for his life ; wild beasts were let loose to tear him to pieces and mighty thunderbolts were hurled at him ; but nothing could make him change his mind. This ordeal lasted seventeen days and Gautama was called Jinnah, the victorious one, because he had put to flight the powers of the Evil One.

On the eighteenth day a very interesting incident happened. At a short distance from the tree under which Gautama sat a village was situated. Sujata, the daughter of the headman of that village, was a comely girl with very pleasing manners. She had prayed to the gods to grant her a handsome husband and bless her with a son, and as both her wishes had been granted she had prepared rice-milk to be given as an offering to them. In the morning she left her village with the rice-milk to propitiate the gods, and walking along the riverside she came to the peepul tree under which Gautama sat. When she saw him he was so calm and dignified, and his face wore such a divine expression, that she was filled with surprise. She



thought that he must be a god who had taken on human form, so she fell prostrate at his feet and offered him the rice-milk which she had brought with her. Thereupon Gautama opened his eyes, accepted the offering and broke his eighteen days' fast by partaking of the rice-milk. This gladdened the heart of the village maiden so much that she went home rejoicing at her good fortune.

When she had gone Gautama again went into a trance and continued his meditations. The next morning he felt that peace which passeth all understanding, and it seemed as though he had been walking through a dark tunnel for a long time and could now see the light at the end of it. He was no longer Gautama but the enlightened Buddha who had realised truth and from whose eyes the scales of ignorance had fallen.

The world was now an open book to him, and the mysteries of life were quite clear. Life held no secrets, and death was no longer a terror. He had, in fact, attained to the supreme wisdom of the gods. To him it appeared that the world was governed by fixed laws of truth and justice. The divine Power regulates everything and order prevails everywhere. If the ignorant man sees disorders anywhere it is his own fault. Nothing happens by chance or accident, but everything can be traced to some cause and leads to certain results. This holds true not only in the physical world, but also in the moral and spiritual world. As the world of nature is governed by universal and fixed laws so the world of mind and soul is regulated by unchanging laws. We cannot think a thought or do any action without reaping its results. A good thought produces a good result, but an evil thought leads to evil consequences. What is true of thoughts is also true of actions. If we do good, good comes to us, but if we do evil we are severely punished. Thus nothing can be done

without its inevitable results. It is our actions in one birth which lead to our birth again and again in this world. What is character is not determined by any one birth only but is the result of many previous births. If we go on committing sins we shall be born again and again, for every person must suffer for his sins.

Buddha saw suffering and sorrow everywhere in the world, 'What is the cause of so much suffering?' he asked himself. He realized that it came from evil and ignorance. Men do not know what is worth while in this life and through ignorance they try to get material gain, earthly fame, riches and glory. But these things are unreal and have no lasting value.

Change is the law of this universe and nothing is lasting. The earth and the ocean are both changing constantly. The ocean gains upon the land, and new lands are sometimes found where it was once ocean. This kind of change is always taking place in the world of both animate and inanimate things. This change, Buddha said, is the result of action. As there is nothing in this world that does not act, so there is change. These changes must continue until man attains everlasting peace or Nirvana.

Nirvana, said Buddha, is the most coveted state of mind. It means perfection, bliss and everlasting peace. He who has attained Nirvana is not affected by the reverses of fortune or the sorrows of this life. The acquisition of worldly goods does not give him pleasure and suffering does not depress him. He is always peaceful and never seeks the pleasures of the world. He is free from pains which ordinary people suffer from. The desire for revenge or thoughts of hatred do not disturb the peace of his soul. Nirvana is thus the shore which bounds the ocean of this life and which we should always be trying to reach.



Nirvana, Buddha said, can be attained only through proper conduct. Character is the thing that matters most. As soon as people practise what is right conduct the kingdom of righteousness will be established in this world. This can only be done if people put into practice the Four Truths and follow the Eightfold Path. He then explained what these Truths are and what this Path is.

The first truth brings home the realisation that there is endless sorrow and suffering in this world, and that both will exist as long as this world lasts. The second truth he enunciated was that sorrow and suffering are born of the desire for possession of material things such as fame, riches and power which are as fleeting as the bubbles that rise on the surface of water. The third truth showed how mankind could free itself from sorrow and suffering by bringing into subjection the evil passions that spoil the purity of the soul. The last and the most important truth showed how all that is low, base, petty and mean in human nature can be eradicated by following the Eightfold path.

The Eightfold Path stipulates that all Buddhists must have a firm belief in the great Laws. They must have high ideals and be distinguished by their gentle speech. They must be known by their upright conduct and follow some profession in the life which is honest. They must walk in the paths of goodness steadfastly even if, by so doing, they have to endure suffering and persecution. They must make good use of their intellect and spend some part of their time every day in meditating on what is good and pure.

Buddha did not advise people to lead good lives by promising them bliss in a so-called heaven or frightening them by describing the terrors of a so-called hell. He stated frankly and directly that virtue is its own reward and that the salvation of life lies in proper conduct.

The knowledge of truth which he had gained Buddha did not want to keep to himself alone but rather to make it known to mankind for their good. He was, however, very reluctant to leave the peepul tree, known as the sacred Bo-tree or the Tree of Wisdom, where he had found abiding peace from the turmoil and fear of life, so he remained there for some time. The desire to deliver mankind from sin and suffering grew upon him after some time and he made up his mind to preach his gospel. He doubted, however, whether people who believed that charms could drive away evil and sacrifices offered to the gods could atone for sins, would listen to him. He gave the matter much thought, and finally came to the conclusion that some would not listen to his message, but that others would welcome it.

Having come to this decision he set out for Benares to teach people his doctrine of goodness. There, in a beautiful forest known as the Deer Park, about three miles from the city, he took up his abode and met again the five disciples who had deserted him. When they saw him coming they scoffed at him and said very unkind things about him. 'Here is the man,' said they, 'who gave up fasting and penance because it was too irksome. He is no better than ordinary men who eat, drink and lead a comfortable and happy life. We will have nothing to do with him, and will let him go his own way.' Buddha knew their thoughts but did not lose patience, and in the evening he explained to them the message which he had to give to the world. The disciples became so interested in what he said that they acknowledged him as their Master, and took a solemn vow to follow in his footsteps. Buddha warned them against the dangers and difficulties of the path, but they reassured him of their determination to lead good lives.

The fame of Buddha as a teacher quickly spread and



people came from far and near to listen to him. He also preached the Law to all who came to hear him, no matter what their social position, their age, or their sex might be. In a short time he gathered round him sixty devoted disciples who were ready to carry out the orders of their Master. One day he addressed them in these words :—  
'Beloved Bhikshus--Bhikshu was the word which Buddha used for his disciples—now that we have learnt what is good and true, we must not keep it to ourselves. Each one of us must go his own way into the world and spread the knowledge of truth amongst all mankind.' So the disciples left their Master and each went a different way, bringing to all people whom they met the message of peace.

Buddha himself went to Rajagriha, the capital of the kingdom of Magadha, to fulfil the promise made to the King Bimbisara, that he would teach him what he had learnt in his pursuit of truth. There, with some of his disciples, he took up his abode in a palm grove. When the king heard of his coming he hastened to the grove to do him honour and touch his feet in reverence. Then Buddha explained the doctrines of his religion which impressed the king so much that he became his follower and repeated the famous Buddhist formula : 'I take refuge in the Buddha ; I take refuge in the Doctrine ; I take refuge in the Order.' Then the king invited Buddha to a meal and also offered, as a humble gift, the bamboo grove in which he had taken up his abode. The grove was quite close to the city, so Buddha gladly accepted the gift, and made it his headquarters.

In the meantime the news reached King Suddhodana that his son had discovered the knowledge of truth and that he was preaching the gospel of peace to all the world. He had a great longing to see his son again, so he sent a trusted servant, with a thousand men, to bring Buddha

back to the home of his childhood. He waited a long time but his messenger did not return, so he sent another, a councillor, but even he brought no news. Finally he sent one of Buddha's dearest boyhood friends who, on reaching there, was very surprised to find that the previous messengers had all become monks and were leading lives of devotion. He himself was so impressed with the divine light shining in the face of Buddha that he declared himself a believer. He did not, however, forget the orders of his king ; and when the rainy season was over, he persuaded Buddha to pay a visit to his native city.

Buddha agreed to do so, and went with his disciples to Kapilavasthu, where he received a splendid welcome from the citizens. Some of his kinsmen took exception to the sight of this monk with a shaven head, a begging-bowl and coarse yellow clothes, as they felt he had brought disgrace upon the proud name of their family, so they hesitated to receive him. But when they saw the king bowing down before Buddha, they were all obliged to show their respect for him.

In the morning Buddha walked through the streets of the capital to beg food for himself. When the king heard of this he felt very much humiliated, so he went to see him and said, 'Why should you, the descendant of a proud line of mighty kings beg for food ? Nothing is more disgraceful for a Kshatriya than to beg.' But said Buddha, 'What have I to do with these earthly kings and their earthly rules of life, when it has never been thought an act of shame for men like myself to beg for our food. In fact, we live on the charity of others.' The king was not satisfied with his explanation and suffering under a sense of indignation and shame, he took Buddha to the palace and gave all the monks a good meal. The palace was a familiar place to Buddha, for it had been his home



when he, as the heir-apparent and dressed in costly robes, had trodden its courtyard. How different was he now, a mere monk who had given up all earthly possessions and in whose face shone the light of peace. In the palace he met all his kinsmen, but Yosodhara was nowhere to be seen. She, his poor forsaken wife, was annoyed with her lord for leaving her as he did, so she did not leave her apartments. Buddha, whose heart was ever filled with kindness, went to find her and as soon as she saw him she fell at his feet, overcome with emotion. He spoke many soothing words to her but she knew that her husband would never come back again, for his life was quite different from that of ordinary mortals.

The greatness and nobility of the soul of Buddha shone in his face and found expression in every word he uttered and in every movement he made. He spread around him such a sense of holiness and peace that all who came within the range of his personality were unable to resist his influence. It cannot be wondered at that his halfbrother Ananda and his cousin Devadatta became converts to the new religion, but while the one became the trusted and devoted disciple of Buddha, the other was insincere and continued to give trouble to the Master. Women begged to be admitted into the brotherhood of monks, but it was not until later that Buddha organised the Order of Nuns ; and it is not surprising to know that Yasodhara was one of the first to join it and became a very earnest missionary of the new doctrine.

It is said that Yasodhara sent her son to Buddha to claim his inheritance. 'My father,' said the innocent boy, 'give me my inheritance, the treasure which I am to receive as my patrimony.' Thereupon Buddha asked one of his disciples to initiate the boy into the order, for he said, 'What is the good of earthly treasures which are

perishable and make the possessor unhappy? I make this boy heir to the kingdom of Righteousness and give him the secret of true happiness.' When the King Suddhodana heard of it he felt very grieved, for he said to himself, 'Who will now rule over this kingdom when I am dead and gone?' He represented this to Buddha who agreed that boys should not be admitted into the order without the consent of their parents.

Buddha stayed at Kapilavasthu for two months and then went back with his disciples to Rajagriha. There he spent his days in the bamboo-grove which King Bimbisara had given to the order, but this was not the only garden monastery which belonged to the monks. There were many more, and one of the most famous was the Jetavana in the kingdom of Kosala. It is very interesting to know how this came to be dedicated to Buddha.

It is said that there was once a rich merchant who happened to pass through Rajagriha with five hundred bullocks laden with valuable goods to sell. At Rajagriha he heard Buddha preach and was so impressed that he became a Buddhist. As a token of gratitude to his Master he wished to give him the most pleasant garden he could find. The beautiful garden of Prince Jeta was an ideal one for the purpose, but the prince did not wish to sell it. After much discussion, the prince agreed to sell as much of the garden as could be covered with coins. On the site which he bought the merchant built a large hall, and around this he put up several houses, and when it was ready he asked Buddha to come and live in it. Buddha accepted the invitation and the gift and when he came to the city he received such a welcome that even an emperor might have envied him. First of all he was met by the merchant's son, accompanied by five hundred young men carrying beautiful flags and banners. Then he was received by



the two daughters of the merchant followed by five hundred maidens with pitchers of water on their heads. The merchant's wife was the next to receive him and she had with her five hundred women carrying dishes of food for the guests. Last of all, attended by five hundred of his friends, came the merchant himself, and he handed over the garden to Buddha.

After months spent in going about and preaching to the people, the monks, especially during the rainy season, used to withdraw to these gardens, where they could rest and devote their time to prayer and meditation. Buddha himself valued these places very much, for every year he spent a few quiet months in one of them and rested from the active and busy life of preaching.

The fame of Buddha as a teacher spread far and wide and thousands of people were eager to hear him. Whoever was in distress sought his advice and whoever was in sorrow went to him for comfort. Though he himself could not be affected by sorrow, yet he had much pity for those who were afflicted by it.

Buddha was about forty years of age when the news reached him that his father was dangerously ill. He made the journey to Kapilavasthu to see him, but soon after his arrival his father died. When the last rites had been performed, Buddha returned to the land of Magadha, to be followed shortly after by the widowed Queen of Kapilavasthu who asked him to take her into the order. Buddha was opposed to the idea of women's entering the order and said to her, 'Please stay at home and seek there the knowledge of truth. You cannot adopt the hard life of a nun for it is full of difficulties and hardships. A similar request was made by his own wife, but she also received the same answer. Both these women were determined to gain their wishes, so as it was impossible to win over Buddha, they

entreated Ananda to plead on their behalf. He interceded with the Master for them and succeeded in obtaining Buddha's consent. Thus the Buddhist sisters' order was founded, an institution which has afforded refuge to many women who had been dealt with severely and harshly by life. It is needless to say that this order attracted a large number of women.

The brotherhood of monks as founded by Buddha has existed for thousands of years and has done much to uplift human character and to spread the knowledge of Buddhist doctrines. It is so well organised that, though it has been established for thousands of years, it is today as well-disciplined a body of self-denying men as it was in the days of Buddha.

Though it is not necessary for a monk to take a perpetual vow to renounce the world, the discipline to which he is subject while he is a monk is very strict and to some it may even seem harsh. Every Buddhist aspires to lead this kind of life at one time or another, even though for a short time, for the time so spent brings him nearer to the goal of Nirvana. A monk must cut himself off from his family and the world and must give up all the pleasures of life and the luxuries of this world. As long as he is a monk he has to lead a homeless life of renunciation.

The ceremony of ordination, though very simple, is yet very impressive. The would-be monk has his head shaven clean as an earnest of his desire to join the order. Dressed in layman's clothes, he walks in front of ten elderly monks till he reaches the raised dais, on which the head of the order sits. Before him he falls prostrate and repeats thrice in a humble and chastened tone his request to become a monk. He then takes off his ordinary clothes and puts on the yellow robes of a monk. Having done this, he kneels before the assembly and repeats thrice the following words,



'I take refuge in Buddha : I take refuge in the Great Truth ; I take refuge in the order.' Next, in order, he takes vows not to kill any living creature on earth, not to steal anything, not to tell a lie, not to drink intoxicating liquors, not to eat at forbidden hours, not to attend any entertainments, never to sleep on a soft bed, or to possess any money. Lastly he vows to lead a pure and austere life, free from all thoughts of avarice, lust and greed.

After this he is taken charge of by an elderly monk to whom he is responsible for everything he does or says. It is his duty to rise before dawn and, after having a bath, to sweep the house, to water the Bo-tree and store drinking water for the day. Meditation forms an important part of his daily life, and every morning he has to free himself from all distracting thoughts and fix his mind upon something holy and uplifting. He is allowed to have only one meal a day which must be taken between sunrise and noon ; and even this has to be begged from the householders living in the neighbouring village. A monk must lead a very simple life, and have no possessions other than such things as a begging-bowl, a razor, a needle, a water-strainer, three robes and a girdle. He must observe all the ritual fasts and do penance and devote his time to preaching, teaching, reading, learning by heart and copying sacred texts. Twice every month the monks meet together and make confession of all the sins which they have committed. The Buddhist nuns lead a life which is very similar to that of the monks, but they live in monasteries specially set apart for them. These monks and nuns are held in great respect by everyone and it is considered to be a most disgraceful thing if one of them, because of improper conduct, is deprived of membership of the order.

As a result of the teaching of Buddha and his followers



the new religion spread rapidly. The character of Buddha and his high ideas impressed people very much, and his preaching attracted people from far and near. It is said that on fine nights Buddha would sit under the shade of a big tree and explain to the people gathered round him the value of right conduct. He did this by means of simple parables and stories which taught simple moral lessons. Many of these stories are well-known even today, and are still helpful to all who seek the knowledge of truth.

It is not possible to give in this book even a small number of these stories, although they are all very beautiful and breathe the spirit of poetry and compassion, but, as an example, the following is probably one of the best :

Long, long ago, there reigned a king in Benares. One night he was wakened from his sleep by some very strange noises, which at first he thought were the piteous cries of cranes from the royal gardens. Then a cow, from the gateway of the elephant-house, made a frightful noise, followed by the melancholy notes of a cuckoo. After that a deer and a monkey which lived in the palace made such a noise that it was evident they were going through some terrible agony. When the king got up next morning, he asked his priests what all these cries and noises meant, and they were all agreed that it meant that some calamity would befall the king. They suggested that a sacrifice should be offered to the gods and that birds and beasts should be killed for the purpose. It chanced, however, that at that time there was in Benares a Buddhist monk. When he was told of it he laughed at the stupidity of the priests, saying that they had missed the real meaning of these noises, but he, himself, refused to give any explanation. The king sent for him and asked him to explain everything to him. 'O king,' said the monk, 'do not be alarmed by these noises, for they



have nothing to do with you. The crane disturbed your sleep at night because it was thirsty, and all the tanks being empty it could not find water anywhere. The crow was sad and disconsolate because some of her little ones had been destroyed by the elephant-keeper while riding on the elephant through the gateway over which she had built her nest.' As soon as the king heard this he gave orders that the elephant-keeper should be dismissed. 'The cuckoo', continued the monk, 'pined for the freedom of the forest. It would be one of the happiest of birds if it were set free.' When the king heard this he set the cuckoo free. 'The stag', said the monk, 'was once the leader of the herd and it made him sad to compare the days of his glory with his present bondage.' In this way the monk explained everything to the king, and as a result he forbade the sacrifice of any animal in his kingdom.

The disciples of Buddha did much to spread the faith but it was the nobility and gentleness of Buddha himself that was the chief attraction ; and the most surprising thing is that he succeeded in convincing people although he did not hold out any promise of a happy future life to them or make any attempt to frighten them by telling them frightful tales of suffering in any future life. What he did say has been very beautifully told in the following story.

It was the harvest season when Buddha went out one morning to beg for food. He had not gone very far when he saw food being given to the labourers and he stood by in the hope of getting some alms. The farmer did not feel disposed to help a man, who, he thought, was too lazy to work, and said to him rudely, 'You do not know how I earn my bread. I plough my fields, sow the seed and gather the grain. It is only by working hard that

I get my livelihood. But how do you obtain yours, since you neither plough nor sow ?

'I also do my share of ploughing and sowing,' said Buddha.

'I am surprised to hear you say that,' said the farmer. If this is so, show me your plough and your oxen.'

To this Buddha replied, 'The seed I sow is faith, the rain that waters the seed is repentance, wisdom is my plough and diligence is the ox that draws the plough. Truth is my sickle and with it I cut away the weeds of sin, while my harvest is the fruit of immortality.'

A life of continual wandering and preaching affected the health of Buddha and his disciples felt very concerned about it. They discussed what should be done and decided that one of them should always be with Buddha as his constant companion. Their choice fell upon Ananda, a very wise decision, for no one was more devoted to the Master than he. As Buddha's personal attendant, Ananda went everywhere with his Master and was untiring in his efforts to attend to his every need. If the Master felt thirsty Ananda brought him water. If he was tired he found him a place in which to rest, and food to eat. It is not surprising that Buddha became very attached to this disciple who, though he was not clever and intelligent, yet had a very lovable nature.

It was not only Ananda who had a great admiration for his Master. All living creatures, whether man or animal, shared his love, and his heart was filled with such kindness and compassion that once he said, 'Any man in whom there is no compassion for living beings, let him be known as an outcast'. He exhorted his followers to be kind to all, not only to those that are strong but also to those that are weak.

He himself was a living example of these truths. One



day while walking through the forest he saw a deer struggling in the meshes of a snare. His heart was always filled with pity at the sight of suffering of any kind ; so he set the animal free. When the fowler who was close at hand saw that he had been baulked of his prey he rushed at him with a drawn sword in his hand, but his courage failed him as soon as he came near to the Master. He fell at his feet and begged forgiveness for his rash act. Buddha readily forgave him and he became afterwards one of the brotherhood of monks. This is only one of a large number of instances in which we are told how persons who came to strike or to revile Buddha remained to worship him, which is all the more remarkable when we remember that Buddha was one of the gentlest of creatures. Here are some of the precepts which he taught his followers. 'Overcome anger by not being angered ; overcome evil by good ; overcome avarice by liberality ; overcome falsehood by truth.' On one occasion he said, 'There is nothing better than to master one's anger. The fool that is angered and who tries to triumph by using abusive language is always vanquished by him whose words are patient.' He himself practised these precepts and by so doing he was able to tame even the wildest of men.

The only person whom he did not seem able to influence was his cousin Devadatta. His mind was so full of evil that, even though he had become a monk, he continued to intrigue for power and plot for the overthrow of Buddha. In all this wickedness he found a ready ally in Ajatasatru, son of King Bimbisara. The first thing he did was to cause trouble between Ajatasatru and his father. The quarrel became very acute and finally he persuaded the prince to claim from his father a part of the kingdom. The king agreed, but this increased the prince's lust for power to such an extent that he demanded the whole of

the kingdom. When the king remonstrated with him on his ignoble ambition, Ajatasatru put him into prison, where he was starved to death.

With the help of King Ajatasatru, Devadatta realised that he could foster his hatred of Buddha. This hatred did not take the form of merely passive resentment, but it soon became an obsession with him to do some injury to Buddha. He hired ruffians and told them to stone the Blessed One to death, but the hearts of the murderers softened at the very sight of the Enlightened One and they refused to carry out his evil designs. Then Devadatta himself resolved to put an end to the life of Buddha. One day when passing through the streets of Rajagriha he threw a stone at him, and wounded him very severely, but thanks to the care of the court physician, he recovered. The recovery of Buddha made Devadatta more determined than ever, and he made other plans to put an end to the life of the Master. He even went so far as to bribe the keeper of a wild and ferocious elephant that had already killed many persons to attack Buddha, but the influence of his personality was so great that even the elephant refused to do him any harm.

When Ajatasatru realised his mistake and repented his crime, he conceived such a dislike for Devadatta that he said he would have nothing further to do with him. Although he had freed himself from the bad and misleading influence of Devadatta, he could not forget his many wicked deeds, and he was greatly troubled in mind. He tried in many ways to comfort himself, but he was always sad and disconsolate.

On one beautiful night in October the agony of the king reached a climax. Though the full moon shone in the sky and bathed the world in its silvery light, the king's heart remained untouched by it. The gardens of the palace which contained very fine trees and flowers, and whose beauty was



enhanced by the rays of the moon falling upon them, could not distract his mind from the thoughts that oppressed him. Even the ministers, who were renowned for their wisdom, could not suggest any way to divert his attention, and the court physician, who was renowned for his skill in healing the sick, failed to restore his peace of mind.

At length it was suggested that the king should pay a visit to the grove where Buddha had taken up his abode, and so Ajatasatru went there with all his ministers. He saw Buddha seated in the grove under a tree with all his disciples around him. The silence which reigned there was so perfect that the king's heart was touched, and he fell at the feet of Buddha, craving permission to ask him a few questions, the answers to which, he hoped, would dispel all his doubts and fears. Buddha replied in a most kindly way that he would be glad to try and set his mind at rest. Thus reassured the king summoned up courage and said, 'What is the good, O master, of renouncing the world? I often wonder if these monks get any reward for their penance in this world.' Before Buddha answered, he himself asked the king a question.

'Suppose that one of your servants renounces the world and all its joys. He discards the clothes which people usually wear and puts on the yellow robe. He shaves his head and goes about with a begging-bowl in his hands. What would you do if such a monk come into your presence?'

'I should rise from my seat,' answered the king, 'and do him all the honour I could.'

'Then,' said the Master, 'is not the monk fully rewarded for all his acts of self-denial, if even a powerful king like you thinks it his duty to do him honour? But this reward is nothing when compared with others that he enjoys. He possesses also peace of mind which is one of the greatest blessings on the earth. His mind is not a slave to the

passions which disturb other people, nor is he bound by any ties to the world. He is as free as the birds of the air which fly where they like. He does not lay up stores for to-morrow, for all that he needs is food to support life and a few clothes to cover his body. The world is for him an inn and he finds a resting-place wherever he goes. He does not want to be the guest of a king, any quiet spot as a place of shelter serves him. In this way he gains contentment, and as his mind is free from envy and hatred he lives at peace with everybody, and his heart is filled with kindness for all living creatures. He knows what is worthwhile in this life and is always calm and serene. Passions do not enslave him and worry does not eat his heart. Thus a monk enjoys peace and happiness.

These words filled the heart of the king with such peace of mind that he spoke most sincerely to the Master. 'O Master,' said he, 'it seems that my mind which at first was like a dark dungeon is now like a room where many lights are burning. Before I leave you I wish to declare my faith in you, your doctrines and your brotherhood. Forgive me, O Master, all my sins, especially the sin which I committed in causing the death of my father who was so good and kind.'

'Do not be worried, O king,' replied Buddha, 'by what you have done. You have confessed your sins, and henceforth you will be a better man.'

The king received the blessing of Buddha, and departed, and ever after he consulted Buddha whenever he was in difficulty.

Once when he wanted to attack a neighbouring tribe he sent his minister to enquire from the Master if he was right in declaring war. Buddha replied that so long as those people were united and respected their



traditions they would not be beaten. Further he said that he did not like war and that it was wicked to take anyone's life.

Buddha was now eighty years of age and he felt that his end was drawing near. As long as he had been able he had moved from place to place, preaching to the people, but now he fell ill. His illness was accompanied by much pain but he bore everything with the greatest fortitude. Ananda, who had become very attached to him, was distressed to think that the end of the Master was so near. Buddha comforted him and said, 'O Ananda, I am now old and my end is near. I have reached four score years and my body is weak and infirm. I am like an old worn out cart which has been bound up with cords to keep it going, and then only with difficulty. You must not grieve for me. Let truth be your guide after I am gone.'

Despite his illness Buddha did not spare himself, and used every effort to spread the knowledge of truth. He sent for all his disciples and reminded them that it was their duty to work for the welfare of mankind. He even set out on a preaching tour after the rainy season was over, and went from village to village until he came to a place called Pava where he and his disciples were entertained by Chunda, a metal worker. The same day he was taken ill, but he continued his journey towards Kusinara, though on the way he had to make many halts because he felt tired and exhausted. At last they reached their destination and Buddha rested under a grove of Sala tree. There he told Ananda how his work was to be carried on and he also laid down the duties of his disciples. When Ananda heard what he thought must be the last words of his Master, he could not restrain his tears, but Buddha comforted

him by saying that what is born in this world must perish sooner or later. He also thanked him publicly for his many acts of loving devotion. Then he asked him to tell the people of Kusinara about his approaching end.

As soon as the people heard this they were very grieved, and many of the men made loud lamentations and the women tore their hair. They all went to pay their last homage to the great Master, and when Buddha saw them he exhorted them to seek Nirvana. The same night Buddha passed away and his remains were cremated with due honour. His ashes were divided into eight parts and over these were raised eight monuments in different parts of the country.

Buddha had fulfilled his mission. He had purged the minds of the people of all kinds of superstitious beliefs and had told them that Nirvana could be attained only through right conduct and without the help of ceremonies. He had told people about the oneness of all life, human as well as animal, and impressed upon them the need of love and sympathy. He had asked them to return love for hate, and to remember that virtue is its own reward. He had exhorted them to have compassion in their hearts and to aim at an inward peace of mind. His message, even though the path of virtue as he described it seemed to be so difficult of attainment, was gladly received and accepted by many people. Today his followers are found all over the world, but mainly in Ceylon, Burma, Tibet, Siam, China and Japan. In these countries, as in several others, Buddhism is practised by millions of people to whom Buddha continues to be a source of abiding inspiration.



# JESUS CHRIST

PALESTINE IS NEARLY half the size of England and lies in the very heart of the Old World surrounded by the continents of Asia, Europe and Africa. It is the Holy Land of the Jews and the Christians, because its valleys and hills, its old roads and streets, its pastures and vineyards have rich and sacred associations with Christ.

The country lies high, forming a tableland, and contains some high mountains. Moses described it as 'a good land'. It is, indeed, a beautiful and picturesque land ; the slopes of its mountains are covered with vineyards and orchards, and its plains grow wheat and barley. It was once a thickly-inhabited country with many villages and towns. It contained many farm-houses and it was a familiar sight to see herds of sheep and goats grazing among its valleys and mountains.

There are two lakes in Palestine ; one in the north-west, the other in the south-west. The southern lake is known as the Dead Sea, for no living creature can live in its salt waters. The country all round it is bare and desolate. A veil of mist always hangs over it and the songs of birds are never heard. The river Jordan flows into it but does not mingle with its waters.

The scene on the northern lake, called the Sea of Galilee, is quite different. This lake is shut in on all sides by high hills, and green shrubs and beautiful flowers grow in abundance. The water of the lake, unlike that of the Dead Sea, is sweet and fresh to taste and birds and water-fowl may be seen there in large numbers. In the early morning one can hear the lark singing and in the daytime the low, soft cooing of the dove may be heard. Hundreds of years

ago the shores of the lake were dotted with villages, with their fruit gardens and green fields. Then it was a familiar sight to see on the lake boats with white sails, and the men in them engaged in fishing.

At the time when Christ was born the Holy Land was divided into three provinces, Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Judea was the most prosperous province, and in it was situated Jerusalem, the Holy City, which was famed far and wide for its splendid temples where the Jews worshipped. It was also the capital of the kingdom and the king had his palaces and courts there. The people of this province were more civilized and better educated than those of the other provinces. Galilee lay to the north and its inhabitants were mostly peasants. Although these people were more primitive than the inhabitants of Judea, they were stronger and more independent. They were sensitive to tyranny and oppression of every kind and ever ready to give battle to tyrants. Both these provinces were inhabited by the Jews, but Samaria was peopled by persons of a mixed race. They were originally heathen, but for many years marriages had taken place between them and the Jews. It had always been their ambition to be united with the Jews, but the latter had never looked upon this idea with favour. Thus there had sprung up a feeling of hostility between the two nations.

The Jewish nation, once prosperous, had now fallen upon evil times. It was ruled over by King Herod, but he was not loved by his subjects. He was not descended from the royal family of David, nor was he an independent monarch. He owed allegiance to the Emperor of Rome and paid tribute to him. He levied heavy taxes, therefore, upon the people which they found difficult to pay, and naturally they were very discontented. The only thing that helped them to bear their misery



and oppression was the secret hope that a king of the house of David would be born, who would come and rule over them. This hope sustained every inhabitant, whether he lived in a far off village amongst the hills or in the more prosperous towns. They all felt that the day of their deliverance was at hand. This had a cheering effect upon them, and as it so happened their hopes were to be fulfilled.

In the province of Galilee there is a small village called Nazareth. It lies in a hollow of the hills, far away from the sea and the much frequented roads. For this reason it is a quiet little place where peace always reigns. It is also a place full of natural beauty and its green hills and bright streams are a joy to all who know it. If you went to the top of one of the mountains overlooking Nazareth, you could see the blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea and the high mountains of Hermon, covered with snow. The people of Nazareth were simple honest folk ; many of them were shepherds and goat-herds whose sheep and goats were their only wealth. Others were gardeners who grew oranges, olives and grapes from which they made oil and raisins and other things. It was very interesting to watch these simple people ploughing their fields, sowing the seeds, and reaping their crops. They seldom left their village except to go to the towns on market days when they sold, or exchanged the produce of their land for such articles of daily use that they required.

In this village lived Joseph, an honest hardworking carpenter. Though the villagers trusted him and employed him, he was a very poor man, and the simple tools with which he could make all kinds of wooden things were his only possessions, but he was a happy and contented person whose only joy was his work. He

was proud of the confidence which the villagers had in him, and he made it the rule of his life to turn out the very best work he was capable of. Though his station in life was very humble, yet he claimed descent from the great king David. He was proud of this, but it did not diminish his interest in his work.

In the same village there lived a beautiful maiden called Mary. She was very charming, and had a sweet nature. Her parents were not rich, but were quite well off. Although there was no necessity for Mary to work, she preferred to do so, and worked hard in the home as well as in the fields. She shared the household work with her mother, and often went alone into the fields to look after the cattle and tend the crops. In spite of doing all this hard work Mary remained tender of heart, beloved by her parents, and adored by her brothers and sisters. The village people also spoke well of her and considered Joseph to be thrice blessed because he was going to marry a maiden who was a priceless gem amongst women. Joseph was also a very happy man and when the marriage took place, there was much feasting, merrymaking and rejoicing among all the people.

Soon after their marriage Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem, seventy miles away from Nazareth. It was a tedious and tiring journey and took them four days. Each day Joseph did his best to lighten the fatigue of the journey for his young wife. He himself walked on foot while she rode on a shaggy ass. On the way he told her about the strange places they came to and pointed out to her the beauty of the wooded hills that could be seen in the distance. They were not alone on the journey, for they met many other people on the road.

All these people had undertaken this journey because of an order issued by King Herod in obedience to the commands of the Roman Emperor whose deputy and vassal he



was. It is said that the Roman Emperor had ordered a census of the inhabitants of the country to be taken, so that he might determine the exact amount of tribute to levy on the land. King Herod ordered, therefore, all the people to go to their native places for the purpose of this counting. Accordingly Joseph had to go to Bethlehem which was his native place, and Mary, his bride, so comely and gentle, so noble and devoted, went with him.

All the plans which Joseph had made for the comfort of his wife at his native place were upset. He had expected to stay with friends, but every house he went to was already filled with guests. All his friends were very sorry and at last Joseph had to go to the village inn, for Mary was very tired and was compelled to rest. Even so, the village inn was no fit place for Mary to live in, for it was a low-roofed comfortless place, so different from Mary's home at Nazareth. It was not possible even to get a comfortable room and they were obliged to occupy an open stable. Joseph did his best, with mats and straw, to make it as comfortable as he could, but it was a cheerless place. Everywhere one saw rough, uncouth people, long-necked camels, asses with drooping heads, horses with their saddles lying near, goats and dogs.

That very night Jesus was born. Jesus, the saviour of millions of people, the adored of many nations, was born in a stable in a public inn, in the month of December when a chill wind was blowing. Great was the joy of the mother and she did her best to provide the baby with all the homely comfort that she could command. She wrapped him in baby clothes and placed him in a manger. Joseph also was happy and was busily engaged in trying to make the first day of the life of this baby on this earth as comfortable as possible. To shelter him against the cold he put up some more mats, and he brought a small lamp so that the place should be well lighted.

Joseph stayed in this cheerless place till Mary got quite well. On the 8th day, however, the child was circumcised according to the Jewish custom and was named Jesus. After about six weeks they went to Jerusalem, which was the chief city of the land of Israel. When they arrived there, they went to the temple which, because of its splendour and magnificence, was one of the wonders of the world. Its marble pillars, its high dome, its spacious courts, its sacred altars—all these filled them with awe. Then, according to the Jewish law which commands that the first-born son in every family should be solemnly presented to the Lord, they made ready to perform this holy and auspicious ceremony. They had no money with which to buy a lamb of a year old to sacrifice at the great altar, so they made instead an offering of two young pigeons. When this had been done the priest took the child in his arms and solemnly blessed him.

Now it so happened that the wicked and cruel King Herod heard of the birth of Jesus. He was afraid for his life and throne because he had been told by the astronomers, after they had observed the movements of the stars in the heaven, that a child would be born who would be the King of Israel and would deliver his people from bondage. King Herod thought this would mean the end of his rule. He made plans to kill the child and sent his messengers in all directions to find it. The child could not be found anywhere and King Herod became very angry. He then gave orders to his soldiers that all children below the age of two should be put to death. They did as he commanded them, and many helpless and innocent babes were massacred, but the life of Jesus was saved, as his father and mother had already fled



to Egypt. As long as King Herod sat on the throne Joseph and Mary and their son remained in Egypt, but after his death they came back and settled down again in the peaceful, mountain village of Nazareth.

There Jesus grew up as a child, but he did or said nothing at this time of his life which could have marked him off from other children. He played, like other children, the games that are beloved of children. He talked like them ; and like them too, he was keenly alive to what he heard, or saw around him. None can deny that it was a happy and sunny period of his life, for he was as yet unconscious of the burden of life and of the sins of the world. These things had then no meaning for him and he lived happily, surrounded by the simple and deep affection of his home and the active companionship of his playmates. None of them had any idea of his future ministry and his noble mission. They thought of him as one of themselves, perhaps one who was a trifle braver and nobler than they.

Though much is not known about the days of his childhood yet it is certain that the land in which he grew up left a deep and vivid impression on his mind, for he made many references to it in his later life. Nazareth, the little town, set in the mountains, held a great attraction for him, whose heart always responded to the beauties of nature. From his early boyhood he developed a great love of all things in nature. He was delighted to live in a valley with the hills towering all around him. He liked to see the fields and gardens, the vineyards and the green valley ; and his heart was filled with joy when he saw the lilies and larkspurs and other wild flowers blossoming in spring-time. When a boy, he made friends with the birds of the air. He had the same feelings of sympathy and

affection for the lark and the thrush, the robin and the sparrow that we have for human beings.

Nor was he indifferent to the lives of those he saw around him. He knew all the peasants in the place, and saw the boys playing in the streets and the girls drawing water from the wells in the evening. Sometimes he paid a visit to his father's shop and saw him hard at work. Maybe he loved to touch the smoothly planed planks of wood and felt pleased to gather up the shavings that were lying about. Thus he grew up as a natural human boy.

At six he was sent to the village school and was taught with other boys of the same age. His teacher had no idea of his future destiny and treated him just as he did the other boys. Longfellow, the famous American poet, tried to picture his life at school and put the following words into the mouth of his teacher ;—

'Come hither, Judas Iscariot,  
Say if thy lesson thou hast got  
From the rabbinical book or not.

... ..

'And now, little Jesus, the carpenter's son,  
Let us see how thy task is done.'

The teacher taught him Shema, which is like the Christian Creed. He learnt by heart some simple moving songs and was given lessons in history. These were very important for him, as through them he was taught what God had done for his motherland in the days gone by. He played in the market place with other children. He sang with them in chorus and sometimes danced in a ring as children do. Long afterwards he recalled one of these rhymes in a sermon, in which he expressed a sense of grief at the foolishness of men who would not listen to his words of advice ;—



'We have piped unto you and ye have not danced,  
We have mourned unto you and ye have not wept.'

These days were, indeed, the happiest of his life. They were happy because he was filled with a sense of the presence of God everywhere. To him the sunrise and sunset, the hills and streams, the birds and beasts, the flowers and fruit seemed to be little daily miracles invested with more than ordinary beauty. He felt that God's love embraces everything. He loves the little lambs that play in the fields. He protects the innocent sheep which have gone astray. He feeds the birds of the air and makes the grass grow in the fields. He watches over the little sparrow which has fallen out of the nest. He paints the wild flowers of the hillside, so that even Solomon in all his glory could not have been arrayed like one of these.

Thus Jesus grew up in Nazareth till he was twelve years old. He then made his first journey to Jerusalem in the company of his father and mother to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. It was a solemn feast held every year by the Jews in remembrance of the time when their forefathers had been delivered from the plagues of Egypt. Joseph and Mary went every year to the holy city for this purpose but Jesus had not been there before, because no boy below the age of twelve was permitted to take part in the feast.

Father, mother and son set out, therefore, towards Jerusalem one fine morning in the company of many of their devout neighbours. They all went on foot, except the women, who rode on asses or mules. They journeyed by day and encamped at night in the open air beside some well of water. At every turn of the road their numbers grew, as other pilgrims joined them. Though the hardships of the pilgrimage were many, yet they were forgotten

because of the pleasant weather. There were neither the rains of winter nor the heat of summer. The road they travelled went past waving cornfields, through mountain slopes covered with olive trees and vines, across flowing brooks and through groves of sycamores and oak trees.

All the pilgrims were filled with joyful excitement at the journey, but no one was more eager and happy than Jesus. His heart thrilled at the prospect of seeing the holy city with its magnificent palaces and the still more magnificent temple. Nor was he disappointed when he reached Jerusalem. The wondrous beauty of the temple held his attention and the smoke of the incense coming from its altars and the melodious singing of the hymns enchanted him. He felt very happy at that time for he had not a single care in this world. His father was alive and cared for and protected him. His mother was with him and pointed out to him the splendour and sacred beauty of the temple. At the same time, he felt a kind of spiritual exaltation and ecstasy. The temple did not appear to him to be merely a place of splendour and beauty, but a place which had a deep spiritual significance. It is, therefore, no wonder that he took great pleasure in the company of the Rabbis, the learned teachers of the Jews, who sat in the beautiful temple courts and explained the doctrines of their religion.

After eight days' sojourn in the holy city Joseph and Mary set out to return to Nazareth. When they halted for the night they could not find Jesus anywhere, and they became very anxious. They enquired about him from their kinsmen and friends, but could get no satisfactory answers. In the end they decided to go back to Jerusalem to see if the boy were there. When they reached the city they searched everywhere,



but could not find him. At last they went to the temple, and to their great astonishment and joy they found him deep in conversation with the great teachers of the Law. They were all astonished at the searching questions that he put to them and the knowledge he displayed of many knotty points of religion. Mary was proud and happy to see that her son was regarded by these teachers as wise and intelligent beyond his years. At the same time, she could not help rebuking him for the annoyance and anxiety he had caused her. So she said to him, 'Son, why hast thou dealt thus with us ? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.' But he said to her, 'How was it that you sought me, did you not know that I must be about my Father's business ?' These words puzzled his poor mother for she was not able to understand their full meaning. It shows that there was already in his mind a faint stirring of the consciousness of his future destiny. He must have felt that the path which he was treading was not that which was being trodden by others. He, however, readily went back to Nazareth with Mary and Joseph, for was he not always obedient to his parents ?

He stayed at Nazareth till he was thirty years old, but in the meantime Joseph died, leaving his wife to his son's care. Jesus did not refuse to shoulder this burden. He himself set up as a carpenter, and all the farmers came to him for their ploughs and cattle yokes. His work gave him great pleasure and he was very proud of his handicraft. All his life he believed in doing honest work, no matter how humble it might be.

His shop was not merely a place in which to do business, it was also a meeting-place for all the wise and intelligent

inhabitants of the town. They all came to him there, and from them he heard what was happening in the wide world. He was also good to children and they were always welcome in his shop. Maybe he told them stories which pleased them or perhaps he gave them the shavings with which they played. They all loved him, and no doubt were attracted to him because of his goodness, his noble nature and his generosity.

His home and his shop did not occupy all his time. He was very fond of solitude and went for long walks in the quiet country-side. During these walks he held communion with nature and with God. He also thought over the great problems which were difficult to understand. He prayed continually for light and the blessings of God. Thus he prepared himself, unconsciously and slowly as it were, for the great work that awaited him.

Jesus was now thirty years old and his life was in no way different from that of his other countrymen. Like them he toiled and worked in his shop, and like them too, he went about his daily duties with cheerfulness and humility in his heart. But at this very time strange rumours reached him of a new prophet who had appeared on the banks of the Jordan, the chief river of the land of Israel, and was preaching repentance to the people. This preacher was John the Baptist whose mother was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. His appearance caused great excitement in the land and many people flocked to hear his words of warning, comfort and hope. Amongst those who went to him were some of the cruel soldiers of King Herod, who asked him what they should do. He told them not to do violence to any man or accuse anybody falsely, but to be content with their wages. In the same way he told some tax-gatherers that they should not exact more from people than was fixed by the king. Some teachers of the Law also went to see



him and he denounced them for their false piety, mock humility and ungodliness. He told them in words which they could not misunderstand that it was not enough only to preach the law of God, to profess great reverence for Him and to call themselves the people of God. To be worthy of God, they should practise what they preached, be possessed of real love for Him, and be always prepared to obey His will.

Thus he preached while standing on the bank of the river, and saying to all around him, 'Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.' If any man felt moved by his words and wished to be baptised, he went down with him into the river, plunged him beneath the water, and afterwards clothed him in pure white garments. He told the people that the day of judgement was coming and that if they did not repent they would all be cut down like dead trees and cast into the fire. He besought them to be kind and unselfish and to give to those who were in need. Everyone who saw and listened to him was impressed with his sincerity and nobility for, though only thirty years of age his whole life had been one of purity and of strict abstinence. When he was very young, he had left his home and had lived a hard and lonely life in the desert, doing without comforts, ease or pleasures. During all those years he lived on locusts and honey, drank the pure water of the brooks and wore a rough shirt made of camel's hair.

It was to this man that Jesus went. It is said that at that time he wore the long seamless robe of a priest which Mary had made with her own loving hands and which was, in a way, prophetic of his future calling. When he met John the Baptist they both felt drawn to each other, and a real bond of understanding sprang up between them. At the same time, John had a feeling that the carpenter, who had come to him to be baptised, was not an ordinary mortal,

but one who was possessed of unusual spiritual powers. He felt that Jesus was a being superior to himself and he hesitated to baptise him. He said to him, 'I am but a poor sinful man and it is you who should baptise me. But Jesus would not listen and the Baptist was obliged to do his bidding. This ceremony marked the turning point in the life of Jesus, and from that day he began his great work and dedicated his life to the service of the poor.

After his baptism Jesus went into the wilderness of Judea, away from the busy haunts of men, and stayed there for forty days. It was the same bare and barren, wild and dreary place in which John had lived for so many years. Wherever one looked there was nothing to be seen except bare, pointed rocks and dull stretches of burning sand. There was no vegetation and no green trees or waving corn-fields to relieve the dreadful dullness. No sheep or cattle were to be found there, but it was the home of wild and ferocious beasts which roamed about day and night. In this desolate wilderness Jesus stayed for forty days. Any other man would have been afraid to take up his abode in such a place, but Jesus wanted to endure hunger and cold, and to give up his ease and comfort so that he might prepare himself for the task which lay before him. He wished to be alone with his thoughts and to make plans for the future. In such a place there was nothing to distract him from his purpose, and he was able to pray for light and guidance before he consecrated himself to his noble mission. When he had spent the forty days in utter loneliness he went back with his heart full of compassion, his mind made up and his soul purer than ever. During this time he had been able to banish all thoughts of selfishness and pride, and to obtain clear and vivid ideas about the sorrows and sufferings of mankind, to whose service he was henceforth to dedicate himself.



After his return from the wilderness, he went towards the banks of the river Jordan, where John had been baptising and preaching to the people. There he met some of the men who afterwards became his devoted disciples. The influence of his personality was so great that when these men saw and heard him, they gave up everything and found the greatest joy of their lives in following him wherever he went and in helping him in his work. Who were they ?

The first of these was John, a young fisherman from the Sea of Galilee. He has himself related the story of his first meeting with Jesus. He tells how he, with a few youthful friends, went to hear John the Baptist. One day while they were talking with him, Jesus returned from the wilderness, worn out and exhausted by the privations of the forty days which he had spent there. The Baptist recognised him at once and pointed him out to his young companions as a most wonderful and holy man who had come to deliver the world from sin. The first sight of Jesus had an instantaneous effect upon the young John and his friend Andrew. Next day they saw him again and there arose in their hearts an irresistible desire to follow him and to talk to him. So they took the same path and followed him at a respectful distance, not knowing whether he would, when he saw them, turn them away or receive them graciously. Jesus heard the sound of footsteps behind him, and turning round saw the two young men following him. In a kindly and passionate tone he asked them, 'What seek ye ?' This question, very simple and plain, left them dumbfounded for some time and they hardly knew what to say. After a while they summoned up their courage and asked, 'Master, where dwellest thou ?' To this Jesus replied, 'Come with me.' They then went with him to his humble dwelling-place and stayed the whole evening. At night they went back to their own lodgings with hearts full

of wonder, affection and enthusiasm. They felt very happy that evening for they had made friends with a really noble and good person. So powerful was the charm that the personality of Jesus exercised over them that they thought it the greatest joy in life to be near him, to love him and to serve him. Their meeting with him transformed them, as it were, and gave them a new purpose in life.

John and Andrew had made the acquaintance of a man of exceptional goodness and they were eager to talk to their friends and relations about him. They wanted them all to meet him and feel the power of his goodness. Andrew, therefore, spoke to his brother Simon Peter about him. Simon was eager to know him and hurried away to see him and he also became one of his truest and dearest friends.

So completely were they drawn towards Jesus that they wanted to stay with him for ever. It gave them the greatest joy in life to be near him and to look into his deep, compassionate eyes and to hear his words of peace and goodwill. Sometimes they thought of their homes and of the humble tasks and homely cares that awaited them there, but they soon forgot such things. One day Jesus told them that he was going to Cana to attend a wedding. They too remembered that they had been invited to the same wedding. So they all set out together. On the way they met Philip whom they already knew, and he also became one of Jesus' disciples. Philip had a friend living in Cana named Nathaniel with whom he wanted to share his good fortune. When Philip saw him he told him all the wonderful things he knew about Jesus. But Nathaniel was very reluctant to believe all that he was told. So Philip brought him to Jesus, and when he saw him he became one of the most devoted of his disciples. These young men were the first five disciples of Christ and they were ready at any time to lay down even their lives for his sake.



When Jesus with his five disciples reached Cana they all went to the wedding of one of his cousins. He was pleased to see the merrymaking and feasting that are the natural accompaniments of every wedding. It filled his heart with joy to see the bride in her veil of white and with her hair twined with flowers, and the joyous and handsome bridegroom. But most of all he was delighted to meet his mother who was a person of great importance at the wedding feast, because both the bridegroom and the bride happened to be closely related to her. All these bright and happy people and their simple natural joy at the wedding made his heart glad, for he was not one of those stern and severe persons who frown at other people's pleasures. He was glad to see people feeling happy and kind-hearted, and he was always anxious to do what he could to give joy to everyone.

He liked only the simple, natural joy which one gets from the beautiful sights of nature, from the innocent merriment of children, from the carefree mirth of young people and from the kind-hearted and disinterested service of others. He could also be angry when the occasion demanded. He never temporized with sin or compromised with evil. He abhorred these with all his strength, and he denounced them in no uncertain terms.

After the wedding he went to Jerusalem to attend the Feast of the Passover. This feast was held annually, and was a thanksgiving offered by the Jews all over the world in memory of their safety in Egypt and of their freedom from bondage when the first-born of every Egyptian family had died. On arriving in Jerusalem he went to the temple to worship there in a very devout and pious spirit. There he saw crowds of Jews, intent on prayer and worship and sacrifice, but the temple was not a fit place to worship in. It lacked the peace and quiet, the

solemnity and the holy blessedness which should be the characteristics of every place of worship. It was, on the other hand, a place full of noisy confusion and the prayers of the priests could not be heard on account of the bleating of sheep that had been brought there to be sold to the pilgrims who wanted to offer them as sacrifices at the temple. The bargaining that was going on between the merchants and the buyers caused great confusion, and this was made worse by the loud shouting of the money-changers when the pilgrims wanted to have their foreign coins changed into the temple money, for it was the practice of the priests to receive offerings only in their own temple coins. All these things had turned the temple into a market place. It was not a holy and blessed place where one could hold uninterrupted communion with God, but a place where the greed of the priests and the commercial spirit of the merchants were very evident. No wonder that in such a place the man of God found it difficult to offer the silent worship of his heart to his Father.

Jesus, who was by nature kind and forgiving, was offended and very annoyed. He disapproved thoroughly of all that was going on and drove the cattle out of the temple court, flung down the cash desks and scattered the money on the ground. Then he turned upon the priests and reproached them for turning the home of God into a market. The priests tried to make excuses and to give explanations, but he would not listen to them. He felt that they had committed an unpardonable sin, and that they must be punished for it ; so he humiliated them and made them feel ashamed before all the people. The priests, whose pride had been offended and the sanctity of offices challenged, listened in sullen silence. They hated Jesus for what he had said and done and secretly meditated revenge but,



as we know, he did not mind, for he believed he was doing that which was right in the sight of God.

The incident caused great excitement in Jerusalem and filled the priests with anger and hatred against Jesus. He stayed there for some days, preaching to the people, exhorting them to repent of their sins, and helping those who were weak and in distress. One night he received a visit from a Pharisee named Nicodemus. The Pharisees were persons of great importance among the Jews for they were the religious teachers of the people. They spent their lives in studying the Law of God and framing rules by which the ignorant people might understand and practise it. They were pious in their own way, but their piety was obtrusive and demonstrative. If they said their prayers they did so in public places so that all people might know it. If they gave alms they made sure that their generosity was well advertised. They were also very strict in observing the letter of the Law even though by so doing they violated its spirit. For instance, they were very careful to give away in charity a tenth part of their possessions, but they were not so strict in observing the elementary principles of justice, truth, mercy and other virtues. But all of them were not so hypocritical and selfish. There were some really sincere and noble persons among them ; and one such person was Nicodemus who came to see Jesus late at night so that he might not be seen by his own people. Jesus had a long talk with him and he went away very much impressed with all that Jesus said to him. It was very fortunate that such a meeting should have taken place, because ever after that Nicodemus used his influence on the side of Jesus.

Jesus now left Jerusalem and went to the banks of the Jordan. There he continued to preach the Gospel and to help people who were in distress. One day he

learnt that John the Baptist had been seized by the soldiers of King Herod and had been cast into prison. This Herod was not such a cruel man as his father, but he was far from being a noble and generous monarch. He was displeased with John because he said that Herod had done wrong in marrying Queen Herodias while her real husband was still alive. It is possible that Herod might have forgiven him, but the queen would not allow him to, as she wanted John to be severely punished. He was confined, therefore, in a gloomy dungeon where he had neither freedom nor fresh air, but he bore his punishment with courage, and when some of his disciples felt jealous because of the success of Jesus he said to them, 'It is all right. My day is done. Have I not always told you that I am of no consequence and am only a forerunner to prepare the way for Christ? I am like a humble friend of the bridegroom rejoicing in his success. I am going away in silence, but in silence must I hear about him. Therefore I feel happy. He must increase and I must decrease.' These were brave and generous words and calmed the fears, and put an end to the jealousies, of his disciples. After John had been in prison nearly three months the king's birthday was celebrated, and a great feast was held, to which all the king's friends were bidden. After the feast, Salome, the daughter of Queen Herodias, entertained the company with a delightful dance, which so pleased the king that he said he would give the beautiful girl whatever she asked for. Salome went to her mother to ask what reward she should request the king to give her. Her wicked mother told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist. The king could not break his promise, and much against his will he sent an executioner to the prison with orders that he was to bring him the head of John the Baptist. So ended



the life of this brave man of God, and it cannot be wondered at that Jesus was deeply affected by the incident.

It is said that some of the disciples of John went to Jesus and told him the story of their master's imprisonment, persecution and martyrdom and warned him against preaching in that part of the country. They entreated him to leave it lest he should meet with the same fate as John. Jesus, therefore, decided to go and preach in the cities of Galilee, beginning with the town of Nazareth, with which he had so many associations. The way to Galilee lay through the district called Samaria, the inhabitants of which did not belong to the same race as the Israelites and did not worship the same gods. Much racial bitterness and religious antagonism existed between the two peoples, and it is not strange therefore that the Samaritans had built their own temple on the top of a mountain and did not worship in the temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, these people refused to offer hospitality to the men of Galilee who happened to pass through their cities and the men of Galilee avoided going through these cities as far as possible.

But Jesus was a man of peace and gave no heed to any such matters. He did not, therefore, avoid these people but passed through their country. One day at noon he found himself in the town of Sychar near which there was a well of water. He had been travelling for days on foot and was feeling tired with continual walking. The heat of the sun was very severe and he was thirsty. So the well, which had seats all around it and was shaded by a roof, was a very welcome resting-place. He himself sat there in the cool shade, resting his tired limbs and sent his disciples into the town to buy food. He had not been there long when he saw a Samaritan woman coming towards the well with a pitcher on her head,

Being thirsty Jesus asked her to give him water to drink. This request astonished the woman and she asked him how he, a Jew, could expect any kindness at the hands of a Samaritan. But there was something about Jesus that made her feel sorry for what she said. When he had talked to her for a while, she realised that he was not an ordinary mortal but a holy man whose thoughts were noble and pure. She opened, therefore, her heart to him and asked him to dispel some of the doubts that had been troubling her. She wanted to know whether God should be worshipped in the temple which her countrymen had built or in the temple at Jerusalem. There had been a long dispute, she said, between her countrymen and the Jews as to the best place for worship. 'Where should we worship, therefore, in the temple on the mountain where our ancestors have been worshipping or in the temple at Jerusalem where you want us to worship?' she asked. Jesus answered, 'Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither pray on this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem. Worship the Father. God is a spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.' When he said this Jesus uttered a truth of far-reaching significance and importance. He was making it clear that in matters of worship the place did not matter, but what was important was the spirit in which the performance of this sacred duty was carried out. What a person should aim at is to enter into communion with the spirit of God and not to pay too much regard to external forms of worship. These words deeply touched the heart of the woman and she offered him her sincere homage. Then she ran to the city to tell her friends and neighbours of his arrival. They all came to hear Christ, and were so inspired by his preaching that they begged him to stay with them.



Jesus stayed in the city of the Samaritans for two days and then continued the journey towards Nazareth, the town where he had lived for many years. On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue and took up the long rolls of parchment on which their sacred books were written and read the portion appointed for the day. He then told the people that he had come to preach the Gospel to the poor so that the broken-hearted might be healed, the captives might win deliverance and that those that were bruised in spirit might be set at liberty. He said that the kingdom of heaven would be established upon earth and that the rich and the great would not have everything their own way, but that the poor and the despised would be looked after with great care. The congregation listened to these gracious words with wonder and approval. But as he continued his sermon and told them that this kingdom would be open not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles whom they hated and despised, their indignation was stirred. The Jews would never believe that the Gentiles were as good as they were. They did not approve of anything which could be shared alike by Jew and Gentile or by those whom they considered to be inferior to them. They protested against these words, and not only thrust Jesus out of the synagogue, but dragged him to the top of the hill on which their city was built so that they might cast him down headlong. Jesus avoided their fury by leaving them, but he realised from their treatment of him that the people of Nazareth were so selfish and ignorant, and so filled with racial arrogance that they were not ready to receive his message. He left, therefore, for Capernaum where henceforward he made his home.

The town of Capernaum was situated on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and was surrounded by fertile lands. Nature had been very generous in her gifts to this place

and it contained many gardens with fine flowers, and green fields with waving corn. In every direction one could see leafy trees which served as a shelter from the heat of the sun. The lake, whose waters were clear as crystal, gave an added beauty to the whole scene.

The town had other advantages also. Here dwelt Peter, Andrew and Philip who had become his disciples. It was a prosperous town, for the lake was full of fish and many of the inhabitants were engaged in fishing. It was also near to the town where the king held his court. On this account it was a busy place, and four great roads led from it to the different parts of the country. The town had a big synagogue with stone walls and huge pillars and the people assembled there every Sabbath day for worship. Jesus also went there and was asked to preach to the people. The fame of his goodness and holiness had already spread far and wide and the place was thronged with listeners. Amongst those who came to listen to him were some of the farmers and fisherfolk with their wives and children. Jesus told these eager people the good news of the kingdom of God; and such was the spell cast by him on the audience that they were all moved by his prophetic words. He spoke to them not in the cramped and hesitating manner of the Scribes but with authority and self-confidence. His message of hope thrilled every heart and his call to repentance chastened every soul. The people felt that they had been purged of their impurity and had shed their sins. He then came to be regarded not only as a healer of the soul but also as one who could cure bodily ailments and physical infirmities. The house where he stayed was, therefore, visited by a large number of poor, sick persons, to all of whom Jesus ministered relief as well as spoke words of comfort and cheer.



That night Jesus went to sleep full of inward peace and happiness for he had been able to help so many people. Next morning he got up early and departed to a desert place so that he might be alone with God and offer Him his heart-felt devotion. It is true that he loved all men and all things, but he loved most to be in some quiet place where he could hold converse with God. Whatever he saw around him filled him with joy for God's power and goodness was evident in everything. Most of all he loved the familiar everyday sights of this world—the flowers in their beauty, the cornfields ripening in the sun and birds flying in the sky. He loved too, the humble people and their occupations—the sowers sowing their seed, the children playing in the streets and the fishermen busy at their work.

The people also loved him and were delighted to hear him and to be the recipients of his disinterested kindness and sympathy. The more his fame for holiness spread abroad, the larger grew the number of people that gathered round him and flocked to the place where he was to preach. The sick and suffering people, suffering in body as well as in soul, collected in large numbers near the house where he was staying, in order that he might speak to them his words of faith and hope, love and forgiveness. They were very disappointed when they were told that Jesus had gone to a quiet place to be alone with God. When Peter saw the insistent and anxious longing of the people to hear him, he went in search of him; and when he had found him he entreated him to remain amongst them. But Jesus wanted to visit other cities to tell the people about the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. At last he yielded to their wishes and agreed to remain one day more in Capernaum. At that time he

saw John and his brother James mending their nets, for they were fishermen. He told them that he was going to preach in some of the cities and said to them, 'Follow me.' There was such magic in his words that they left their homes, their boats and their work and followed him. In the same way he asked Peter and Andrew to follow him and they, too, gave up everything in order to be with him and to further his mission. He also made Simon one of his apostles. These men, especially Peter, thought themselves too worldly and sinful, and therefore unworthy of his company. But Jesus said to Peter in a voice that seemed to infuse new hope and courage into his wavering and contrite heart, 'Fear not, Peter, from henceforth thou shalt catch men instead of fishes.' Thus he chose these men to be his helpers in his great mission.

But Jesus knew that four men were not enough to carry on his great work, so he chose a fifth one who was none other than Matthew the Publican, a cruel and extortionate tax-gatherer. All his life he had been gathering taxes and by so doing, inflicting hardships on the people. He insisted that his tax must be paid; and if the poor could not pay, he made them sell their nets and boats. He was, therefore, in the eyes of the people a tyrant. But, although the people did not know, Christ knew that there was plenty of good in him, and that sometimes he had felt a great dislike for the work which he was called upon to do. Jesus lifted him, therefore, out of the mire of sin and selfishness and called him to a life of purity and godliness. The people did not understand and scoffed at Jesus for his action.

This same Matthew gave a farewell dinner to which he invited Jesus as well as all his friends. Jesus went



to the feast, and everybody was astonished that he should sit in the company of publicans, sinners and outcasts. Such meaningless criticism was worthless in his eyes, because he was charitably disposed, and saw the good even in the most wicked person. A similar feast was given by Simon, the Pharisee. He was a well-to-do citizen and gave a splendid dinner to all the guests, but while it was taking place a strange thing happened. A poor girl, who was known to be a bad character, rushed in and knelt at the feet of Jesus.

This intrusion annoyed everybody, but the most indignant person was the host. He thought that such a girl should not enter his house and contaminate his guests by her presence. But Jesus, the man of infinite sympathy, understood everything. He knew the sorrow of her heart, and pitied her lonely and desolate condition. He knew that she was ashamed of her sinful life, for she washed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. His heart went out to her in sympathy and he spoke to her words that gave her peace, comfort and hope. These words had a magic effect upon her and she became a changed person. In after life she was one of the most worthy examples of the Christian mode of life. You will wonder who she was? She was Mary Magdalene, who came to be famed far and wide for her piety.

Thus Jesus lived, healing the sick and the afflicted, and telling the people about the kingdom of heaven. So great was his fame for wisdom and holiness that wherever he went he was followed by great multitudes of people. When he left Capernaum he passed through many of the cities of Galilee till he came to a high mountain surrounded by a big and vast plain. He had with him his disciples or apostles, and he was followed by large numbers of people who wanted

to know what he meant by the kingdom of heaven. This was a very solemn moment in his life, and before he explained to the people the meaning of the kingdom of God, he wanted to be alone to pray to God for strength, light and guidance. He went alone up into the mountain and told his disciples to bring the people to the mountain-side at a certain time. Then at the time appointed he spoke to the assembled people. So solemn were his words and so noble and godly was the speaker that everyone was deeply moved. What he said became known afterwards as the Sermon on the Mount, and the following are some of his sayings :—

‘Blessed,’ he said, ‘are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’

‘Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.’

‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.’

‘Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled.’

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.’

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.’

‘Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.’

‘Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’

‘Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.’

Then he went on to tell them that they were the children of God who is wise and good and kind to all, not only to those who are pure in heart but also to the wicked and the unfaithful. He told them that they should all strive to become perfect as God is perfect and that they should all glorify Him by letting the light of their good works shine before men on this earth.



He said that he had come, not to destroy the law of Moses and the words of the prophets which they had been taught, but to honour and to obey and to fulfill them—to teach men their true significance and exhort them to obey them in a higher and truer sense than before. It was not enough, he said, merely to refrain from doing evil which the law forbade, but they should be noble, and pure and free from sin even in their thoughts.

He told them that if God was their Father and the Father of all, all men must be regarded as their brethren. Formerly they had been taught to believe that they should love their neighbours but should hate their enemies and that they should take an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, but henceforward they should love even their enemies, do good to those that hated them, bless those who cursed them and pray for those who treated them badly. They were, therefore, to bear injuries patiently, to return good for evil, to give away gladly whatever was asked. Above all they were to judge mercifully, despairing of no man, condemning no man, and extending their love and kindness to all like their heavenly Father who maketh His sun to shine upon the evil and the good and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust.

He further told them how to worship God. They were not to worship Him like hypocrites who say long prayers and give alms in public places so that they might win the praise and approval of men. The prayer which God approved was the secret and sincere prayer of the heart. In order that people might know how to pray to God he taught them a simple prayer which runs thus :—

‘Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we

forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.'

After teaching them how to pray to God and ask His grace for the provision of their daily food and His blessings for doing their daily duty, he told them that they need not have any anxious thoughts concerning the future.

'Behold,' he said, 'the birds of the air. They sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, and your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Be not, therefore, anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Lastly he told them that whatsoever things they desired that men should do unto them even so must they do unto others. This, he said, was the only path by which they could enter the kingdom of heaven. 'Enter ye in,' he said 'by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in thereat. But narrow is the gate and straight is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.'

In order to bring this truth home to their minds he told them the story of two men who both wanted to build a house. One thought only of doing what was easy and pleasant and built his house on sandy ground near the sea-



shore where he had no difficulty in laying the foundations. The other went farther away from the sea and built his house on a piece of rocky ground where, after much toil, he laid the foundations strongly and surely.

'And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto the foolish man who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall thereof.'

The assembled people listened to him with rapt attention and great reverence. He seemed to speak as no one had ever spoken before ; and every word pointed the path to a higher, nobler and purer life. They marvelled at his wisdom and goodness. Such was the effect produced on them by his simple and inspiring words that they found it very difficult to leave him. So they followed him even when he had come down from the mountain. But he went on his way, helping those who were in distress, bringing happiness and joy into the life of the poor and lonely and relieving those who were in sorrow, in pain or afflicted with any kind of disease.

After the Sermon on the Mount he left Capernaum to visit other towns. He sailed over the beautiful Sea of Galilee and reached the city of Nain which was at some distance from the coast. There he gave to the people his message of deliverance and they all hailed him as their saviour. After some time he went back to Capernaum and lodged in the house of Peter. As usual, he was followed by multitudes of eager people who, because there was no room for them in the houses, were obliged to stay outside. Jesus knew this and soon left the house. He loved freedom and nature and preferred to live out of doors. He felt that it was far better to teach the people in the open spaces of nature, where the vast blue sky was overhead and the fresh

breezes blew around them rather than in the narrow confines of a house. So, he turned his footsteps towards the sea-shore ; and seeing a boat he entered into it and began to address the people.

He knew the audience to which he spoke. They were simple, humble folk who wanted to lead a spiritual life and to learn how this might be done. He talked to them in a language which they could understand. To make his meaning clear he told them parables which, though they sounded simple, had a profound meaning. At this time he told the story of a sower who once went forth in the spring-time to sow his field. He scattered his seeds ; but some of them fell on the pathway where they were left exposed and the birds of the air came and picked them up. Other seeds fell upon rocky ground, where the soil was not fertile and there was very little moisture, so they were quickly withered by the sun. Again, some of the seeds fell among thorn bushes and the thorns grew up and left no room in which the seeds could grow. But some of them fell on fertile soil and they sprang up and yielded fruit. Each seed that took root and grew, became in time an ear of corn bearing seeds, which numbered sometimes thirty, sometimes sixty and sometimes even one hundred on one stalk. When he had finished his parable the disciples asked him what the story meant and he told them that it was the picture of the kingdom of God. Many people are called to enter that kingdom and the seed is the word which calls them. But some hear the call without paying much attention to it. These are like the people whose seeds were sown upon the pathway. Others listen gladly for a time, but they fall away when harassed by trouble or overcome by hardships like the seeds withered by the sun. In the case of others the cares and riches and pleasures of this world fill their minds, just as the thorn bushes covered the ground, and crowd out noble thoughts.



But there are some honest and noble people who listen to the word and understand it. It is in their hearts that the seed of righteousness springs up, grows and bears fruit. In the same way, he told several other parables which make even in these days a strong appeal to our hearts and imagination.

Thus Jesus continued to minister to the people of Capernaum as well as to the people of places near it. He had, moreover, a great desire to go to other parts of the country and help them by his presence and teaching. So, he took a boat and sailed away. He landed with his disciples on another coast, where he was welcomed by the people with open arms. As usual he went about among the cities and villages teaching people and relieving them of their distress. It was no wonder that wherever he made his appearance the people cheered and hailed him as the king of the Jews. They were so charmed with his goodness that they wanted him to drive out the Romans who were tyrants, and reign in Jerusalem as king. This was due to the fact that they did not understand his teachings about the kingdom of God. They thought that it was to be an earthly kingdom in which there would be no oppressive taxes and where poverty would be unknown. Among his many followers were several women who had sacrificed everything for his sake, his disciples whose greatest joy in life was to obey him, and numbers of other people. He himself went about his work full of joy and confidence. He never thought of the morrow and never troubled to know how either he himself, or his followers, were to be fed. If some kind person asked him to stay in his house he gladly accepted the invitation. Sometimes he spent the night in the open air in the company of his disciples, sleeping on the ground, and watched over by the stars. At other times, while the disciples were asleep, he went away alone and spent the whole night in prayer to God.

Thus the days went by and the number of his followers increased from day to day. This simple trust, unquestioning obedience and deep devotion of the people touched his heart and filled him with compassion, and he said to the disciples, 'The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore to the Lord of the harvest that he send forth labourers into his harvest.' Afterwards he went away and passed the night in prayer. The next day he called his disciples together and said that he was going to select twelve of them for a particular purpose. They were to be his chosen friends and were to accompany him wherever he went. Seven of these disciples had already been chosen and to this number he added five more. He asked them all to teach and serve the poor like himself. He asked them to practise the utmost selfdenial and live in poverty. Like him they were to have neither gold nor silver nor even a change of clothing, but were to depend for everything upon the kindness of those whom they taught. He further told them that they must be prepared for toil and suffering and hardship and must be ready to lay down even their lives, if need be, for the truth they were to preach. Moreover, he told them that they would not be toiling and suffering alone, but that their Father in heaven would watch over them and care for them. On his part he would never demand any sacrifice from them which he would not be prepared to make himself. 'He that doth not take up his cross and follow after me,' said Jesus, 'is not worthy of me. He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it ; but he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.'

After thus instructing his twelve apostles he sent them out, two by two, to teach and serve in all the cities of Galilee, and he himself set out alone for Jerusalem. Wherever he went he told people of the kingdom of God and



called them to repentance. He also helped those whom he found in distress. While doing so, he never took into account the Jewish custom of observing the Sabbath which meant the cessation of all work on that day. He believed that in the eyes of God all days were the same and that no difference should be made between the Sabbath and the other days so far as the relief of the poor and suffering was concerned. He pointed out that the work of God goes on every day of the week, the Sabbath as well as the others. The sun continues to rise and set ; the sky presents the same appearance ; the trees and flowers grow and are nourished ; the rivers keep on flowing ; the children of men are protected from all harm on the Sabbath as on any other day. He said, therefore, that he would follow the law of nature rather than the customs of the Jews and would not cease from doing good on that day. This annoyed the Pharisees very much and they began secretly to make plans to persecute him, but this did not deter him from carrying on his work of love and kindness.

Jesus did not stay long in Jerusalem but returned to Galilee. There he met all his disciples who gave him glowing accounts of their journeys, but they were not left long in peace even there. The Pharisees continued to take offence at everything they did or said. They even found fault with Christ's unselfish and disinterested acts of service and began to denounce him as a heretic, that is to say, as one who did not conform to their long-established faith. They even took counsel together and decided to destroy him. But Jesus was not afraid and continued his efforts to rescue the people from their life of sin and wickedness, for he believed that his kingdom was not of this earth but of heaven and that the enemies against whom he was waging war were not human beings but evil, sin and wickedness.

This did not please some of his disciples. They had followed him in the hope that he would lead them against the Romans and that they would rule and govern in the place of their enemies. But Jesus explained everything to them and said that while he would give them the bread of life he did not promise them any riches of the world. The apostles continued to stand by him for they had learnt the truth from him, and knew that Jesus cared nothing for the things of this world. The Jews still continued to oppose him and to denounce him as a deceiver of the people and the breaker of the Law, and this made it very difficult for him to live in Galilee. He went away, therefore, to the land of Phoenicia for rest and quiet, but even there the people came to ask his help, and he could not refuse them. His heart went out to those in trouble or pain and he was always ready to lend a helping hand to such people. He did not expect any reward or gratitude from the people, but the faith that some of them placed in him and their devotion to him were remarkable. It was all the more marked because these things came to him not from his own people the Jews but from the Gentiles. Their great faith really touched him.

During all this time Jesus continued to teach the people and to explain to them his mission. He was aware of the false tales which his enemies were spreading about him and of the plans they were making to take his life. Many times they had set traps for him, but he had foreseen the danger and had avoided it. Any other man would have been very angry with the people who were trying to do him harm, but his feelings for them were only those of pity and kindness. He believed that we should always bless those who cursed us and pray for those who persecuted us.

Finally Jesus left Galilee for Jerusalem, but he was very sorry to leave. He took a last look at the clear and



beautiful waters of the lake and at its pleasant shores on which stood so many towns and villages inhabited by the humble people whom he loved. He lingered near Capernaum which had for him so many loving associations. He passed through the country of Samaria, the inhabitants of which declined to do him any honour because he was on his way to Jerusalem, with the residents of which they had a long-standing quarrel. He journeyed through the country of Paraea where he again came into contact with the tyrannical and selfish Pharisees. It was a rich land and the people owned large flocks of sheep, but he told them that the measure of a man's riches was not the number of the things of the earth which he possessed. He exhorted them to lay up their treasures in heaven by living a noble and blameless life, at peace with themselves and with their neighbours. Though he himself was the last man to give offence to anybody the Pharisees did not wish him well. They hated him because of his growing power and despised him because he did not uphold their laws, customs and tradition. They were annoyed to be told that they were proud and hypocritical and that the kingdom of God belonged to those who were humble in spirit and sincere in their love and devotion. All these things made them so angry that they made secret plans to put him to death, but for a long time they were unable to lay their hands on him.

Although Jesus was despised by the Pharisees, he was loved by the people. They trusted in him and listened to his words with the utmost reverence. They invited him to their feasts and asked him to accept their hospitality. On one occasion a young woman disciple poured over his head all the precious ointments which she had, because she wanted to make him the very best offering which she could. Her action, though greatly appreciated by everyone, was misunderstood by Judas Iscariot, the

disciple who afterwards betrayed Jesus. He rebuked the woman saying that the ointments should not have been wasted in that way, but should have been sold and the money given to the poor. In reality he was constrained to speak thus, not because of his love for the poor but because he was greedy and was keen to make money. Jesus understood all this and said, 'Why trouble ye the woman? She hath wrought a good work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you, but me ye have not always.' Then he told them that he would be soon taken away from them and be put to death. The pious and generous woman had, therefore, done to him what the Jews always did to the dead, for they poured precious ointments upon their dead bodies.

Then Jesus entered into Jerusalem followed by the multitude who had accompanied him from Galilee. At this time he rode upon an ass, as was the custom of kings and great men on such occasions. All along the route, the people received him gladly and shouted his name for joy. Some of them were so pleased because of his arrival that they tore off their upper garments and spread them in front of the ass so that their beloved master might have a carpet to ride on. Others climbed up the palm trees growing near the road and cut branches which they strewed before him. When he came within sight of Jerusalem he was greatly impressed with the beautiful city, and its gorgeous temples, towers and palaces. It made him sad to think of the day when it would be destroyed because of the sins of its people. When he reached the temple he asked the crowds to leave him and go away. This triumphant entry into Jerusalem injured the pride of the Pharisees and they tried their best to belittle him and to prove that his teachings were wrong. They asked him awkward ques-



tions to upset him and interfered with his movements in every possible way. But in spite of their unjust treatment and their unseemly behaviour he continued to teach in the temple, and in the end denounced the Pharisees for their greed, for their false zeal, for their distortion of the truth, for their attention to unimportant things and their neglect of the more important duties, for their obedience to the letter rather than to the spirit of the law, and for their outward show of goodness. Last of all, he told the people that there were many troubles in store for them. Their city would be laid in ruins and their country would be conquered and laid desolate. The people would suffer much distress and persecution and their woes would be many. Finally they would be delivered from this tyranny and would again live as free and happy citizens.

It was only to be expected that the priests would resent these words. He had, they thought, abused them by calling them liars and hypocrites, and by so doing, taken away all that made them holy and revered in the eyes of the people. They assembled at the house of the head priest to make plans to put him to death, but before they had decided upon what to do they were informed that a stranger wished to speak to them. This stranger who was brought before them was none other than Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples of Christ. But he was not really a disciple, for he had failed completely to live up to his faith. He was very fond of money and was prepared to do anything so that he could obtain it. So, he made a bargain with them and promised to betray his master for thirty pieces of silver. This crime has always been regarded as one of the darkest in the world's history of crimes, and his name has been handed down to denote

anyone who betrays another for the sake of making money.

Before his arrest Christ had dinner with all his disciples, which has been described as the Last Supper. This dinner was held in Jerusalem and the preparations for it were entrusted to Peter and John who spared no pains to carry out the wishes of their master. At this solemn feast a strange thing happened. It was the custom of the Jews to take off their shoes when they entered a room and to wash their hands and feet before they sat down to a meal. On this occasion the washing, which was usually done by the humblest slave, was neglected, for the disciples were more anxious to know who was the greatest amongst them and who had a right to the most honourable place, than they were to perform this humble duty. Jesus understood this and determined to teach them the greatest lesson of life, namely that true greatness is to be measured by service and not by power. He is the greatest of men who does most to serve his fellowmen. He himself, therefore, washed the feet of his disciples in spite of their loud protests. In the end he said to them, 'Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.' It was at this supper that Jesus referred again to the great trial that awaited him. He told the disciples that he would be betrayed by one of them, a thing which all of them, including Judas, strongly denied. But Jesus knew better, so he offered prayers to God and asked Him to bless his disciples by



guarding them from all harm, by keeping them away from evil and by making them the evangelists of truth.

After the supper he went with all his disciples to a garden on the Mount of Olives called the Garden of Gethsemane. Here again he told them of his impending death, and said that some of them would forsake him. This did not matter, he said, for he would always be with them and protect them with his love. After this he again poured out his soul in prayer to God. This was indeed the most critical time in his life, but the thought of God's great love for him and for all mankind made him forget his own suffering. Because of the sin he had seen in the world, the lack of mutual understanding that he had noticed between man and man and the treachery of which he himself was going to be a victim, he wanted to pray to God. The prayer strengthened him and he came near to the hour of his trial filled with courage having a peaceful heart and an unfailing trust in God's love and mercy.

In the meantime Judas had gone to the High Priest and made known to him the place where Jesus was. The High Priest sent him with an armed band consisting of his own servants and Roman soldiers, and Judas told these guardians of the Law that they should arrest the man whom he kissed. So he went forward and kissed Jesus saying, 'Hail Master.' When Peter saw that the soldiers were going to arrest Jesus he drew his sword and smote one of the servants of the High Priest. But Jesus commanded him to put the sword back into its sheath and leave him alone to face this ordeal. Fear then seized the disciples and they all forsook Jesus and fled away.

Jesus was soon brought before the priests who were to try him. This trial was a mockery for they had already made up their minds to condemn him to death ; and for this purpose they had paid false witnesses to give evidence again-

st him. There were a great many witnesses but no two of them agreed in what they said, a thing without which nobody, according to the Jewish Law, could be condemned to death. All this time Jesus maintained a dignified silence and this annoyed the priests very much. they all wanted him to say something which would enable them to lay their hands on him. At last the chief priest put to him some questions to which he gave direct and definite answers. When he heard these answers the chief priest accused him of blasphemy and passed sentence of death upon him.

Since the country was under the Romans, the sentence had to be confirmed by the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. It was then midnight and no one dared to disturb him, so Jesus was left in charge of the servants of the soldiers, who handled him very roughly. They spat in his face and struck him with their hands. They made all kinds of insulting remarks, but Jesus bore everything with extreme patience.

Just about this time, it is said, Judas paid another visit to the priests. On this occasion he did not appear to be as gay and confident as before. He was, on the other hand, suffering from the tortures of his conscience and his outward condition and manner bore traces of it. His hair was untidy, his eyes were bloodshot and his movements showed nervous anxiety and fear of punishment. 'I have sinned,' he cried with a broken voice and and threw down the thirty pieces of silver. But this did not make any impression on the priests, for their hatred of Jesus was very strong.

Next morning they summoned Jesus again to their presence and confirmed the death sentence which they had already pronounced upon him. Then they took him, bound like an ordinary criminal, to the palace of Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor. There Jesus was taken into a magnificent room called the Hall of Judgment while the



priests remained outside. They did not like to be defiled by entering the palace of a heathen because it was the time of Passover. Pilate knew it full well and, therefore, went out to enquire from them what accusation there was against the condemned person. Knowing that it would not do to bring a charge of blasphemy against Jesus, they trumped up a charge of sedition against him. He was, they said, perverting their nation, forbidding people to give tribute to Caesar and declaring that he himself was king. When he had heard what the priests had to say, Pilate asked Jesus if these charges were true and whether he was the king of the Jews. To this he replied that his kingdom was not of this world and that he was born to bear witness to the truth. Then Pilate asked him, 'What is truth?', and before Jesus could give him a reply he went out to the chief priest and said, 'I find no fault in him.'

These words made the priests very angry and they repeated their charges saying that he was stirring up the people against the Romans all over the country, in Galilee and elsewhere. Pilate did not know what to do, for on the one hand, he thought that Jesus was innocent and it was not just to shed his blood, but on the other hand, he wanted to please the Jews. He decided, therefore, that the case should be tried by King Herod, the ruler of Galilee, who happened to be at that time in Jerusalem.

Jesus was then taken to the palace of Herod who had already heard a great deal about him. Herod asked him to perform in his presence some of those miracles which were attributed to him, but he would not do so. He then put some questions to him, but to these Jesus would not give any answer. This attitude, on the part of Jesus, annoyed Herod very much and he sent him again to Pilate. Before he went he mocked him and dressed him in splendid robes such as a king usually wore.

Jesus was then taken back through the streets to the house of Pilate who came out into the courtyard and sat upon the judgment seat. He was now more than ever anxious not to have the blood of Jesus on his hands, because his wife had pleaded for him, but he had not the courage to defy the Jews. He remembered, however, that it was a custom among the Jews that every year at the feast of Passover one prisoner should be released ; and it was the people who had the right to say who should be set free. Pilate reminded them of this and asked if he should set Jesus free. The priests foresaw danger in such a course and they worked up the people into a great rage against Jesus. They demanded with one voice that Barabbas, a murderer and robber, should be set free and not Jesus. The governor further asked what he should do with him and they shouted, 'Crucify him, crucify him !' Pilate wanted to know why they were so determined to take his life, but the people, instead of giving any reasons, cried again and again, 'Let him be crucified.' In the hope that the people might be appeased, Pilate ordered the prisoner to be scourged. His orders were carried out and Jesus was scourged with unnecessary violence. When the scourging was over he was again made to put on the purple robe in which King Herod had arrayed him, and in addition a crown of thorns was pressed upon forehead and a reed, instead of a sceptre, was placed in his hand. He was then saluted in a mocking spirit by all and addressed as the king of the Jews. As if this were not enough the people again spat upon him and struck him with the reed. Then Jesus, faint and bleeding, was brought into the presence of Pilate. When he saw him, a victim of the madness of the priests, his heart melted with pity. He also hoped that the people would give up the idea of inflicting any more torture upon him. But it was a vain hope, for even if the people had thought of relenting,



the priests would not have allowed them to do so. They, therefore, cried again, 'Crucify him, crucify him !,' and because they thought that Pilate hesitated to pronounce the sentence they reminded him of his duty to the king. They made Pilate afraid for he thought that he might lose his office if the Jews brought such charges to the notice of the Emperor. His chief thought was for his personal safety, so he delivered Jesus into the hands of the priests and the multitude to be crucified. Nevertheless he felt in his heart that he had done something wrong, so he sent for water and washed his hands before all the people saying, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it.' But even this did not cool the anger of the multitude and the priests and they said, 'His blood be upon us and upon our children.'

Jesus was then taken to the place of execution called Calvary, which was outside the city walls. As was the custom he was himself made to carry the cross on which he was going to suffer. The clothes which he had been made to wear in scorn were then taken away from him and his own clothes were given back to him. It was not easy for him to carry the cross after the pain, agony and privation which he had already suffered, and another man was made to bear it on his shoulders. But Jesus was not alone this time. He was followed by a crowd which consisted mainly of the priests and the Pharisees and the people who had demanded his blood. There were also some of his own followers, the people who honoured Jesus. The most notable among these were a number of women who were overcome with grief.

When they came to Calvary the soldiers took Jesus and nailed his hands and feet to the cross. He bore all this pain with wonderful courage and did not utter any cry, except that a prayer escaped from his lips and he said, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.'

Then the cross to which his hands and feet had been nailed was lifted from the ground and set between two other crosses, on each of which there hung a thief. On each cross was an inscription stating the crime for which each one was being made to suffer and the cross of Jesus bore the words, "The king of the Jews." A large number of people watched the execution, the most conspicuous among them being the chief priests. Blind prejudice had hardened their hearts so much that even now they mocked and insulted Jesus. The two thieves who were hanging by his side also joined them in reviling him. But he did not hate them. With eyes full of compassion he looked at the crowd and saw amongst them his beloved disciple John and his mother Mary. Turning to the disciple he said, 'Behold thy mother.' At the same time he said to his mother, 'Behold thy son.' So great was the courage and patience shown by Jesus at this critical hour that one of the thieves was greatly touched by it and rebuked his companion for scoffing at Jesus.

The pain which he had to endure at this time was so severe that a bitter cry escaped from his lips, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.' But soon he regained the composure of his mind and with undaunted courage said, 'Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'

Thus was Jesus crucified. It was strange that he who had always honoured God should have been charged with blasphemy by the priests. It was still more strange that he whose life-mission had been to serve mankind should have been accused of claiming to be a king. But the strangest thing of all was that he whose heart overflowed with kindness for others should have been made to suffer such cruelty and pain at the hands of those whom he loved.



# MUHAMMAD

ISLAM IS TO-DAY one of the most widely spread religions in the world, and its followers number about seven hundred millions. They are to be found amongst many races and nations, and in almost every part of the world. In India, Islam is a living force, and the Muslims are very progressive. The inhabitants of Turkistan, Afghanistan, Persia, Mesopotamia, Turkey, Arabia, Syria and Palestine are all Muslims, and firmly believe in Islamic faith, culture and civilisation. The whole of North Africa professes the faith preached by Muhammad ; and in East and South Africa there are large numbers of the Faithful. Compared with Asia there are not many Muslims in Europe, though probably some are to be found in every country. The greatest number of European Muslims live in Russia ; and to a lesser extent in Poland and some of the smaller countries. In China they number forty millions, but in America there are very few.

Islam was founded in Arabia about thirteen hundred years ago. Before that time the country was in a deplorable condition, and was passing through what may be described as the dark age. The people were in a state of semi-barbarism and their ideas of religion and morality were those of savages. It is true that they believed in one God, but they worshipped Him in rather a strange way. They thought that God could not Himself look after all the inhabitants of the earth, and had, therefore, entrusted the management of the universe to different gods and goddesses. These gods could cure the sick, grant boons to all who asked for them, and make the world safe for the habitation of man.

If an epidemic broke out, they alone could stamp it out ; and when there was famine, it was only their help that could bring it to an end. Can we wonder, therefore, that the people offered sacrifices to them, and tried to appease them in every possible way ?

But where were these gods ? They could not be seen anywhere on the earth, and the people wanted to worship something material which could be seen. The result was that they worshipped stones and trees, especially the former, of which they were very fond. In the Kaaba alone, it is said, there were three hundred and sixty idols, but in addition to these, every tribe and every household had its own idol. People were given so much to the worship of idols, that when a person went on a journey, he would carry four pieces of stone with him. Three of these were used to make a hearth, and the fourth served as an object of reverence. They also worshipped the stars, which they thought had a mysterious influence on the destinies of man.

The majority of the people worshipped idols or stars, but there were also atheists in the country who believed neither in God nor in the hereafter. On the whole it may be said that these early Arabs had become very indifferent towards religion, and their belief in their idols was but superficial.

There is a story told of a man whose father had been murdered. He consulted an oracle to know whether or not he should avenge the murder, but every time he did so, the answer was in the negative. At last, mad with rage, he said, 'Wretch, had it been the murder of thine own father, thou wouldst not have forbidden me to avenge it.'

In addition to religious evils, the Arabs suffered from many others both political and social. They had no strong central government, and a peaceful and well-ordered life was almost unknown. Arabia was inhabited by many small tribes, which were constantly at war with one another.



These disputes were usually due to very trivial causes, but the consequences were very often disastrous. A word of scorn spoken at a poetical contest, a gesture of contempt during a horse-race, or a mere brawl in a street, would incite people to warfare and result in the deaths of many men. These feuds were handed down from one generation to another, and sometimes whole tribes were wiped out in these wars. The Arabs frankly believed that might was right and did not think that bloodshed and plunder were at all wrong.

In social matters the Arabs were very backward. Most of them were nomads, that is, they did not stay in one place, but wandered wherever they could find water to drink and fodder for their cattle, and at such places they pitched their camel-hair tents. Women occupied a very lowly position, and were regarded as an item of property, which could be inherited like lands and cattle. For this reason a woman had no share in the property of her husband or her father, and at her husband's death the heir could dispose of her in any way he liked. Sometimes he would marry her himself, or give her in marriage to someone else. She could be divorced on the slightest pretext, not once only, but many times. Polygamy was practised by the Arabs, and a man could take as many wives as he pleased.

The Arabs had no regard for women, and looked upon them merely as objects of pleasure. The birth of a daughter was not a welcome event in a household. Nevertheless, woman inspired Arab poets, and even though they did not have a very high conception of her character, they sang of her physical charms and beauty.

Besides their love of sport and fighting, the Arabs were fond of drinking and gambling. They drank large quantities of wine, especially on holidays and on the occasion of festivals and fairs. Gambling was regarded as an ordinary

pastime, and was indulged in by almost everybody. If a man did not gamble, he was thought a miser, one who loved money more than anything else. Gambling was sometimes a sign of wealth and generosity, and for this reason a gambler stood high in the estimation of the people.

These people were mostly illiterate, and as with other people in similar circumstances, ignorance went hand in hand with superstition ; in fact, the Arabs were the most superstitious of people. They believed in evil spirits which lived in dark and solitary places, and caused disease and ill-luck, and thought that all such spirits could be kept in control with the help of spells and charms. These charms could be obtained from soothsayers and fortune-tellers, in whom the Arabs had great faith. The soothsayer told them when to go on a journey, and interpreted omens for them. For instance, if a bird flew across their path from left to right, they thought that it would lead to something good, but if it flew from right to left, it was a bad omen and meant disaster.

The Arabs had very strange ideas about the human soul. They thought that it was something very small which entered the human body at the time of birth and continued to grow until the person died. When death took place the soul took on the form of an owl and kept hovering over the tomb. If the man had been killed by some enemy, the bird cried, 'Give me water, give me water,' and did not cease till the murder had been avenged.

Such were the people amongst whom Muhammad was born, and it was through his efforts that they became one nation and a mighty people.

The parents of Muhammad belonged to the Quraish, a very powerful and influential tribe which occupied Mecca. It was believed that the Quraish were descended from Ishmael, the elder son of the prophet Abraham, just as the Jews were



descended from Isaac, his younger son. This tribe could boast of many wise and powerful leaders, one of whom had been Qusayy. He was a born leader of men, not only in the time of peace but also in war. As their acknowledged leader, he was entrusted with the flag of the tribe ; and it was he who presided over the meetings of the heads of families. He was very generous and kind-hearted, and arranged that all the poor pilgrims who came to Mecca, should be guests of the people and be provided with food and drink for three days without charge. His influence with his people was so great that they all carried out his instructions willingly.

Hashim, one of the grandsons of Qusayy, became as famous and powerful as his grandfather. He was extremely rich and very generous. Once, when famine broke out in Mecca, he distributed amongst the people foodstuffs, which he had bought from Syria—an act which was always remembered with gratitude by the people and which earned him their undying respect.

The Arabs lived mainly by trade, for which Hashim obtained many facilities for them. He made treaties with the Emperors of Rome and Persia as well as with the King of Abyssinia, which enabled the Quraish of Mecca to trade with those countries without any difficulty. He also concluded alliances with other tribes in Arabia, and as a result the Quraish were able to trade, unmolested, anywhere.

Towards the end of his life, Hashim made a journey to Medina, where he met a lady named Salma. She was of noble birth and a lady of great charm and fine character. Hashim fell in love with her and married her. Unhappily he died soon afterwards while on a trading expedition to Syria, but before he died Salma gave birth to a son, named Abdul Muttalib, who afterwards became the grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad.

When Abdul Muttalib grew to manhood, he became the chief of Mecca, and many things which he did while he was chief, are remembered to this day. It is said that the famous and ancient well of Zamzam, whose water was considered holy, had been filled up with earth. Abdul Muttalib found the well, had all the earth taken out, so that once again it began to yield cool, sweet and sparkling water. The people flocked from far and near to drink at the well, and blessed Abdul Muttalib for rediscovering it. This well exists to this day and every pilgrim to Mecca takes back with him some of the holy water.

As Abdul Muttalib's power and influence grew day by day, certain people became very jealous of him, but he always acted wisely when dealing with his enemies. He thought that much of his success depended upon the number of his sons, and he prayed to God to give him ten sons. His prayer was granted, and the youngest son, who was named Abdullah, became the father of the Prophet Muhammad.

Abdullah married the Lady Amina, who belonged to a very noble family. She became a widow very shortly after her marriage, because her husband, like his father before him, was taken ill on his way back from Syria and died. Three months after his death, on April 20th, 571 A. D. Muhammad, the Holy Prophet, was born at Mecca.

When Abdul Muttalib heard of the birth of his grandson his joy knew no bounds, and, together with the leading men of his tribe, he went at once to see the child. He took him in his arms to the Kaaba, and there offered prayers for his long life and prosperity. The child was named Muhammad. His mother loved to call him Ahmed, and the Prophet is known by both these names. The two words 'Muhammad' and 'Ahmed' have the same meaning.

It was not customary for noble Arab ladies at that time to nurse their babies, so a nurse had to be found. His first



nurse was Suwaibia, one of his uncle's slaves, whom the Prophet loved and honoured all his life. It is said he always treated her with the utmost kindness and respect, and provided her with clothes and money as long as she lived. Suwaibia had not nursed the child very long before he was given to Haleema, of the tribe of Bani Sa'ad. Haleema was, at first unwilling to take charge of the child, because he was an orphan and the care of him was not likely to be very profitable for her, but finally she agreed to do so. She was very kind to him and gave him as much love and affection as any mother, so that he thrived well under her charge. The desert life made him sturdy and strong, and he learnt to speak Arabic very fluently. In after life someone asked him the secret of his eloquent speech, and he replied that it was because he had been brought up amongst the Bani Sa'ad who were famous for their love of, and aptitude for, poetry.

The Prophet lived with his foster-mother till he was six years old, and he never forgot her kindness to him. Whenever she was in trouble, he came to her help. Once during a severe famine, when she sought his help, he gave her a camel, some sheep and a quantity of food. He always loved her as his own mother, and on one occasion when she went to see him at Medina, he was so overcome with emotion, that he cried, 'My mother, my mother.'

When Muhammad was six years old, Haleema took him back to his mother. Shortly after, Lady Amina went to Medina to visit the grave of her husband and took her little son along with her. They stayed at Medina with a near relative for about a month. Muhammad was not, however, destined to enjoy his mother's society for long, for on their way home she fell ill and died. When Muhammad visited his mother's

grave fifty-three years afterwards, he was deeply moved, and could not restrain his tears.

After his mother's death, Muhammad went to live with his grandfather Abdul Muttalib, who took great interest in his welfare. But Abdul Muttalib was then eighty years of age, and when two years afterwards, he also died, Muhammad went to live under the care of his uncle Abu Talib.

At that time Muhammad was a fine example of an Arab boy, who loved the wide desert and the hills and valleys that lay round it. Most boys of his age grazed sheep and goats, and he, too, loved this healthy, open-air life. With them he shared such sports as are loved by boys, and together they wandered over hill and dale. As a result, he grew up a manly and robust youth, but in spite of his bodily strength, he did not lose his gentle disposition. Such was the charm of his manners, his winning courtesy and the refinement of his speech, that all who came in contact with him loved him. His unassuming modesty, the humility of his spirit and his love of truthfulness made a deep impression upon everybody. Abu Talib, who himself was a good and kindly person, was very proud of his nephew.

Muhammad was now twelve years old, and up to this time had led a very quiet and sheltered life. The call of adventure, however, came to him, and he wanted to visit new countries and learn about strange men and their ways. The opportunity came when his uncle resolved to go to Syria on a trading expedition. Abu Talib thought Muhammad was too young to bear the hardships of the long journey, but Muhammad would not listen to him and insisted on going with him. He was told that Syria was a long way off and that the journey was uncomfortable, but none of these



things had any effect upon him. He delighted at the thought of a long journey, because it would afford him the opportunity of seeing strange lands, of meeting interesting people and listening to their tales of adventure round the camp-fire.

It is said that in Syria he met an Arab monk named Bahira, who was so impressed by his intelligence and noble mind that he prophesied a great future for him, and begging his uncle to guard him from all harm, said, 'This boy is destined to be the liberator of his country and the saviour of his people. You should, therefore, see to it that he does not fall a victim to the intrigues of his enemies.'

When he returned from Syria, Muhammad led a very quiet and uneventful life, and being a person of a contemplative turn of mind, he was usually deep in his own thoughts. At this time were laid down the foundations of that strength of purpose which stood him in such good stead in later years.

After the death of his grandfather there was no strong man in Mecca to take the lead, and to set an example to the people. The inhabitants became more wicked and dissolute than ever, and the strong began to oppress the weak, and finally matters came to such a pass that even defenceless travellers were openly robbed. Some of the inhabitants, who were sensitive to injustice, called a meeting, to which some of the leading citizens of Mecca, mostly Muhammad's relations, were invited. They all took an oath to protect every one from injustice, and to ensure the safety of all the travellers who visited Mecca. They decided that if any traveller was robbed, they would make good his loss out of their own pockets. Muhammad took great interest in all this, for he was the sworn enemy of oppression.

Muhammad's great desire, at that time, was to be of some service to his uncle. He tended his sheep and cattle,

an occupation which suited his temperament, for it gave him an opportunity to be alone with his thoughts. The contact with nature also helped to strengthen his character.

He did not enter fully into the life around him, but occasionally went to some fair, where contests in poetry or rhetoric were held. He was very interested in things of this kind, for it enabled him to satisfy his love of learning and public speaking.

As a young man of twenty-five Muhammad was quite unlike other young men of the same age, many of whom led gay and dissolute lives, drinking, gambling and swearing. In contrast to theirs, his life was a fine example of simplicity, his manners were modest and unassuming, and his bearing upright. Loyal to his friends and generous towards his enemies, the Prophet was kind and tolerant towards all. He was very fond of children, and took a great interest in their games. He was never frightened by difficulties, and was known as a steady and reliable youth who would never do anything petty, mean or dishonest. It is no wonder that the people of Mecca had such admiration for his character that at Amin they called him Al-Amin, the Faithful.

He was just as handsome in appearance as he was noble in character. He had a fine head set on broad shoulders, and his arched eyebrows and piercing eyes denoted insight and intelligence. He had a shapely nose, and even, white teeth, and a full beard which lent dignity to his countenance.

Such was Muhammad at twenty-five, an attractive, intelligent and reliable youth, well-known for the integrity of his character and the nobility of his soul.

Up to this time Muhammad had not undertaken any business on his own account, but as his uncle's affairs had become less prosperous, he had to find employment for



himself. He, therefore, took service with Khadija, a wealthy widow of Mecca.

Khadija's parents had been wealthy and had given her a very rich dowry. She had been married twice, and both her husbands had been men of means. She was forty years of age, and it afforded her great pleasure to help honest and deserving young men, by lending them capital with which to trade in foreign countries, in return for getting a share of the profits. By this means she added greatly to her wealth, but throughout it all, she remained humble and modest, and the inhabitants of Mecca called her 'the Pure'.

Khadija gave Muhammad the money to buy goods with which to trade, and with these he set out with a caravan for Bostra in Syria. There he sold the goods with much profit, and returned with an unusually large sum of money. He went to his mistress and gave her an account of his journey; and when she heard all that he had done, and the profits he had made, she thought him to be an extraordinary person. His upright bearing, his attractive manners and the truthfulness of his speech filled her with admiration. Little by little she began to love him and expressed a wish to marry him. Though the difference in their respective ages was great, Muhammad had a high regard for the lady for her many virtues, and they were married.

Muhammad lived happily with his wife for a number of years. They were devoted to each other, and their love continued during the whole of their lives. They had six children, two of whom were boys.

After his marriage Muhammad's fortunes grew, since all the wealth of Khadija was at his disposal, and he made the best possible use of it. His business prospered and he rose steadily in the estimation of the people, all of whom respected and trusted him. So great was his reputation

for honesty that people deposited their moneys and valuables with him. Muhammad administered the trust faithfully, and thereby won the confidence of everyone.

At this time an incident occurred, which proved Muhammad's wisdom and resourcefulness in finding a way out of difficulties. The Prophet was about thirty-five years old when the Kaaba was destroyed by heavy rains, and the inhabitants of Mecca decided to rebuild it. The building of the Kaaba was regarded by them all as a sacred work, and no effort was spared to finish it as quickly as possible. When the walls had been built and the roof put on, a dispute arose among the tribes which threatened to disturb not only the peace of the city but of the whole of Arabia. They could not decide amongst themselves which tribe should have the honour of putting the Black Stone in its place. Each tribe considered itself superior to the others, and eagerly coveted the honour, even to the point of fighting for it. Finally, someone suggested that the man who entered the Kaaba first should arbitrate in the matter. This suggestion was accepted by everyone, and they all agreed to abide by the decision of the first comer. To the surprise and joy of all, Muhammad was the first to enter the shrine that day, and he was hailed immediately as the arbiter. It was by no means a pleasant task, yet Muhammad did not shirk it, and soon solved the difficulty in a way which satisfied everybody. He spread his mantle on the floor and placed the Sacred Stone on it. He then asked the four principal chiefs of the tribes to take hold of the four corners of the mantle, with the Black Stone on it, and lift it into its place. In this way an open quarrel was avoided, and the honour and pride of each tribe satisfied. Thus did Muhammad show his capacity



for leadership, and his ability to handle a difficult situation in a satisfactory manner.

During all these years of prosperity and happiness, Muhammad did not forget his uncle who had been so good to him. Fortune had not favoured Abu Talib, and he found it impossible to support all his family. There was, too, at that time, a famine in the land, so in order to help his uncle, Muhammad adopted one of his sons. This was Ali, who afterwards became a famous warrior.

Muhammad was the soul of kindness, and his influence was felt and never forgotten by those around him. One man, who fell under the magic charm of his personality, was a slave named Zaid, who had been presented to him by his wife. He was an inhabitant of Syria, who, early in life, had been captured by robbers and sold as a slave. After passing through many hands he was bought by Khadija, who made him the personal attendant of Muhammad. A strong and deep attachment sprang up between the two, and when Zaid was offered his freedom he preferred to stay with his master and refused to go back to his home with his father.

At the age of forty, and though outwardly at peace with the world, Muhammad really felt sad and depressed. He saw around him poverty, cruelty and injustice. The Meccans had forgotten God and lived lives of wickedness. The strong persecuted the weak and the rich were proud and haughty. They all worshipped idols and forgotten the true worship of God.

All these things weighed heavy on his mind. He wanted to put an end to the ignorance and degradation into which his people had fallen, and above all it was his great desire that they should turn to the worship of the one true God. He spent anxious hours trying to devise some means by which his people

might become better men and women, but the difficulties were great and it was a long time before the light of truth came to him.

Near Mecca there is a lofty hill called the Mountain of Light, at the foot of which is a cave. The view from this cave is bleak and rugged. On the east and south, lofty mountain peaks can be seen ; while on the north and west the country is barren and desolate. Muhammad used to go to this cave whenever he wanted to rest or think. Here he pondered over the problems of life and death ; and here he meditated on the condition of his people. The cave offered him a refuge from the turmoil of the world and the agony of his own mind. One day in the cave, when he was deep in thought, he saw a strange light. Immediately after this he heard a commanding voice, which told him that he was the Prophet of God, whom God had called to show the path of truth to humanity. He was to teach people that there is only one God, and that there is no no other God except Him and that He alone should be worshipped.

It was a great task which he had been given—this task of reclaiming his people. How was he to accomplish it ? He knew his people and their evil ways. He knew how cruel they were. He wondered if he could persuade them to forsake the paths of sin and pleasure. He felt that they would not take him seriously, but would denounce him as a false prophet, and perhaps abuse him and plan his death. He realised that, in spite of his position, he would be alone, friendless and helpless. What would he do if they all combined against him ?

Doubts, such as these, beset him, but during all these difficult days he was sustained by the conviction that God was on his side, so he quietly set about his work, and exhorted those nearest him to believe in the one, true God, and forsake the worship of idols. He asked them to embrace



Islam, which meant the complete and implicit surrender of their will to God. He said, 'There is no god but God ; God the most Merciful, the Lord of absolute will, the Master of men and the King of the world ; the judge on the Day of Reckoning ; the true Omnipotent who begetteth not, nor is begotten by any, the like of whom exists not in the universe.' /He further said that when the world began, all the people cherished this splendid and noble faith, but as time passed, belief in the one true God waned. To re-affirm this true faith, God had sent a prophet to every country, but their teachings had been lost, and he, Muhammad, had been sent to the whole world and as the last of prophets./

To capture the imagination of the people he gave, in verse, vivid descriptions of Heaven and awe-inspiring pictures of Hell. 'Heaven,' he said, 'would be the blissful abode of the righteous, and the tortures of Hell would be the miserable lot of sinners. In Heaven there would be fragrant gardens and vineyards, but in Hell there would be boiling water and fires that would burn the bones to ashes.'

The Prophet knew that the time had not yet come to give this message to all the people ; so, at first, he took into his confidence only his own near relatives and intimate friends. Khadija was the first person to whom he spoke about it. She had such perfect faith in him that she believed forthwith, and became the first Muslim. Ali, who was then only a boy, and Zaid, the slave whom he had set free, were also converted to Islam. But it was not only the members of his household who adopted this new religion ; some wealthy merchants and some brave warriors also accepted it. Such were Abu Bakr, Usman and Sa'ad. Abu Bakr was one of the most respected citizens of Mecca, and a fine man. He was about the same age as the Prophet, in whom he had implicit faith. When he was told that Muhammad claimed to be a Prophet, he said "That

must be true, for my friend always speaks the truth.' Usman afterwards married the Prophet's second daughter and became the third Caliph; and Sa'ad became the conqueror of Persia.

But most of the converts were humble persons, slaves and poor artisans. The Prophet gave them his message secretly in a small house in the city or near the hill outside it. He taught them how to say their prayers, and recited to them soul-stirring verses from the Holy Quran. Thus he imbued these people with the love of God, and infused into their minds zeal for a godly life.

Muhammad's teaching was, in the beginning, carried on secretly, but afterwards he began to preach his religion publicly to the people of Mecca. Some of them resented the new faith and did all that they could to suppress it. In vain the Prophet argued with them about the uselessness of idolatry and the worthlessness of idols. At first though they listened to his pleadings, they neither said nor did anything, and later they even became hostile. They decided to worship idols that could not even help them, rather than God, the Almighty, who has made us and who protects us at all times. There were, also, other reasons why they did not like Islam. It asked them to give up their life of sin and to reform, whereas they were not willing to give up their pleasures and their evil ways. The call to a purer and nobler life did not appeal to them. They also felt jealous of the growing power of Muhammad, for they feared lest the leadership of the people should pass into his hands and into those of the members of his tribe. They also viewed with alarm the doctrine of equality which Islam preached. 'How could labourers be our equals?' said the horrified chiefs of Mecca. 'We are born to govern and they are born to serve. How can the shrub of the desert be equal to the palm tree that grows there?'



So they tried to make trouble for the Prophet, and when offers of bribery failed, they threatened him with persecution. They even tried to bring pressure to bear on Abu Talib and asked him to persuade his nephew not to preach against their faith, but Abu Talib was so convinced of the sincerity and earnestness of the Prophet that he refused to listen to them. When the Meccans realised that the Prophet was determined to carry on his crusade against the worship of idols and to continue to persuade the people to worship the one and only true God, they grew desperate and relentless in their persecution. They began to persecute the Muslims, as the followers of the Prophet were called, so that it became almost impossible for them to go about the streets of Mecca. The Meccans scattered thorns and dug pits in their path to annoy them. These persecutions affected the rich and the poor alike, both the masters and their slaves, but the slaves suffered most. They were often beaten by their masters, and made to lie either on live charcoals or on the burning sands. Abu Bakr and Khadija tried to put a stop to such ill-treatment and spent money freely in buying freedom for the slaves.

These sufferings were inflicted not only on the men but also on the women, some of whom were beaten to death and others deprived of their eyesight. Nothing, however, would induce these people to give up Islam or their faith in Muhammad, and one Abyssinian slave, named Balal was dragged through the streets of Mecca and made to lie on the sand in the scorching heat of the sun. There he was flogged, but instead of giving up his faith he cried out, 'God is one, God is one.'

The Muslims were persecuted so much in Mecca that they decided to take refuge in Abyssinia, but their persecutors even followed them there, and asked

the King of Abyssinia to banish them from his country. This he refused to do, because he was a believer in fair play and wanted to hear what the Muslims had to say for themselves, before he took any action against them. Ja'afar, brother of Ali, then told the king all about the new religion, and how it had made men of them. The king was so impressed with what he heard that he refused to give them up and allowed the refugees to stay in the country. Meanwhile, in Mecca, things went from bad to worse. The Quraish were determined to put down Islam but were unsuccessful, for Islam continued to spread and found favour with many people. Two of the most influential and notable converts at this time were Hamza and Omar, and their adhesion to the new faith was a most notable event. Omar, particularly, had at one time been such a determined foe of the new religion that he had made up his mind to kill Muhammad. He probably would have done so had not someone suggested to him that, before dealing with Muhammad, he should first enquire into the conduct of his sister and her husband, who had both become Muslims. He was so stung by this remark that he rushed at once to the home of his sister. He found her and her husband reading verses from the Holy Quran, and this made him all the more angry. Without stopping to think, he attacked them and beat them unmercifully, but they would not give up their faith in spite of his cruelty. His sister's courage and the sight of her bleeding face so touched the heart of Omar that he himself embraced Islam. His conversion was a great accession to the strength of the Muslims.

The effect of these conversion was to stiffen the opposition of the non-Muslims to the followers of Muhammad.



They realised that if Islam continued to spread so rapidly, all their power and influence would soon be gone. They said, 'We are the leaders of Mecca now, but soon we shall be no better than slaves.' A council of war was held and they decided to boycott the Muslims. 'We will not give our daughters in marriage to the tribe of Muhammad, nor will we take theirs. We will have no business dealings with the Muslims and will not sell them any food. We will not be content until Muhammad is delivered up to us.' An agreement to this effect was drawn up and hung in the Kaaba, which meant that it was to be faithfully and religiously observed.

After this edict none of the members of the tribe of Muhammad could get any food. They all gathered in the quarter of Abu Talib and suffered so severely from hunger that they were forced to live on the leaves of trees and dry skins. Despite their sufferings nothing could make them disown their faith, and they possessed the same indomitable spirit which had led the Prophet to say to Abu Talib, on an earlier occasion, 'O uncle, should they place the Sun in my right hand and the Moon in my left, in order to make me renounce this mission, it shall not be. I will never give it up until it shall please God to make it triumph or until I perish in the attempt.'

This state of affairs continued for three years, at the end of which the Quraish themselves, thinking that the punishment was too severe and unjust, withdrew the edict. But the ordeal through which they had passed, had put the faith of the Muslims to a severe test, and out of their trials they had derived unity and strength.

The Prophet had triumphed but his own troubles were not yet over. Soon afterwards his cause suffered loss through the death of his uncle, Abu Talib who, though not a Muslim himself, had been a tower of strength to the.

Prophet. Even worse for him was the death of his devoted wife, Khadija, who had always been his best comforter and helper. It is because of these two bereavements that the year came to be known as the 'Year of Grief'.

Though active persecution stopped, the Quraish resorted to other means of interfering with the Prophet's preaching activity, and did their best to keep others from listening to him.

When he went to deliver his message to the inhabitants of Talif, a place near Mecca, he met with little encouragement, the people displaying greater hostility than even his enemies at Mecca. They interrupted him many times during his discourse and would not allow him to finish it. They insulted him; they jeered and even pelted him with stones. Although he was exhausted and bleeding, they would not let him rest, and continued to ill-treat him until he was three miles from the city. Then they left him, and the owner of a garden nearby felt compassion for him, and sent him some fruit.

These he took and praised God for His blessings, and the servant who brought the fruit was so impressed with the nobility of the Prophet that he at once embraced Islam.

Such discouragement would have broken the spirit of any man, but Muhammad persevered. During the days of pilgrimage to the Kaaba, he preached to several of the tribes, but none of them, except some pilgrims from Medina, would listen to him. The latter heard what he had to say, and six of them accepted Islam. In course of time the number of his followers in Medina increased, and he sent a special missionary to preach the faith to them. Thus Medina accepted what Mecca had, so far, rejected.

The Prophet was so impressed with the sincere devotion and the deep-rooted faith of the Muslims of Medina, that when some of them came to see him, he expressed a



wish to live amongst them. The inhabitants of Medina welcomed this proposal and said that they would be glad to have him in their midst. He warned them of the danger in which they would be placed, if he went to live amongst them. He said that it might lead to war with the whole of Arabia and spell disaster, desolation and death for them. But they were not daunted and replied, 'Why tell us about these things ; do we not know them already ? We will defend you to the last drop of our blood.' Then they swore undying friendship for Muhammad and departed.

Having been promised a safe refuge in Medina, the Muslims went there in small parties of three or four at a time, the Prophet himself being the last to go. Before he went, he wished to give back to the people the money and the ornaments which they had deposited with him. When the Quraish heard of his intentions to migrate to Medina, they became alarmed, and said, 'If Islam takes root in Medina, very soon it will overpower us. Let us, therefore, devise means to put an end to the heresy as soon as possible.' A meeting was, therefore, held and many suggestions put forward. It was decided finally that the Prophet should be put to death, and that one member for each tribe should be chosen to perpetrate the deed. This decision was accepted by everyone and steps were taken to carry it out as soon as possible.

One night, all those who had been chosen went to the house of the Prophet, determined to take his life, but he had been warned of the danger and left the house in the dead of the night while the would be assassins lay asleep before his door, leaving Ali asleep in his bed. Great was their disappointment, therefore, when, in the morning, they found that the Prophet had escaped and Ali had been left behind in his place.

They did not, however, forsake their intention. They

searched everywhere for the Prophet who, in the meantime, had taken shelter in a cave. It is said that some pursuers went almost up to the mouth of the cave, and when Abu Bakr heard the sound of their footsteps, his courage failed him, and he felt afraid, not for his own life but for the life of him whom he regarded as his redeemer. The Prophet set his doubts and fears at rest and spoke words of good cheer. In reply to Abu Bakr's despairing question, 'what shall we do now? We are only two.' 'Fear not,' he said, 'God is with us,' and God did protect them, for their pursuers left the place without entering the cave.

At the end of a journey lasting thirteen days, the Prophet came to a place near Medina, where he rested for some time. When he entered the city he was given a great welcome. The inhabitants received him dressed in brightest robes, and the women greeted him from the house-tops. The little children, whom the Prophet always loved, were the happiest of all. Thus did the Prophet enter Medina amidst the rejoicings of its people. The inhabitants of Medina were afterwards known as Ansars or helpers; while the Muslims who had left Mecca were called Muhajirin. The Muslim era dates from this event.

At Medina the Prophet was looked upon as the chief Magistrate of the city. His first act was to build a mosque in which the people could pray. The walls of the mosque were made of mud and unbaked bricks, and it had a roof of palm leaves. The Prophet himself worked with the rest, despite the protests and entreaties of his followers, for by so doing, he wanted to teach the people that all honest work is noble and dignified.

Another task was to make provision for the refugees who had left their homes to share with him the hardships of life in the new city. He summoned to his aid all the Muslims of Medina, and asked each to take home with him



one refugee and to divide his property equally with him. It was a great act of self-sacrifice on their part, but each and all willingly agreed. They were all satisfied with their lot, as it afforded them an opportunity to further the cause of Islam.

The Prophet was aware of the continued hostility of the Quraish and knew that they had set a price upon his head, and that whoever killed him was to be given one hundred camels. They hated him, not only because he preached a new faith but also because, being in Medina, he was in a position to put a stop to their trade with Syria if he chose to do so. The prophet knew that hostilities might break out at any time between the inhabitants of Mecca and Medina, and to make his position secure he concluded an agreement between the inhabitants of Medina, both Jews and Arabs, whereby they were to defend Medina against any attack made upon it, and not to give protection of any kind to the Quraish. He also entered into similar alliances with other tribes.

The Prophet knew that the only way to bring the Quraish to reason and keep them from molesting him was to hamper their trade. Before any effective action had been taken by the Muslims, the Quraish sent an army of one thousand strong to protect a caravan, which carried goods worth several lacs of rupees, in the direction of Medina. It was a critical moment for the Muslims, and a council was called at which it was decided to give the enemy fight. Every Muslim capable of bearing arms rallied to the standard of the Prophet, and an enthusiastic but small force of three hundred and thirteen men set out to meet the army of the Quraish.

There was a marked contrast between the armies which met near the well of Badr, three stages from Medina. The Muslims were poor, ill-clad, and had very

few horses and camels, whereas the Quraish were well-equipped, three times in number and confident. When the Prophet saw them, he exclaimed, 'O God, if the Muslims are killed, who will then worship Thee on the earth ?' Then he addressed his soldiers in these words, 'Courage, O faithful Muslims ; fight fearlessly ; stand firm ; let fly your arrows ; victory will be yours.' The battle began, and for a time the Quraish - seemed to have the upper hand and the disheartened Muslims might have dispersed, but the Prophet urged them on to fight in the name of God. He prayed to God for victory, and then, taking a handful of sand, he scattered it into the air, saying in a loud voice, 'May God humble the pride of the Quraish.' At this point, the tide seemed to turn. The Muslims summoned all their strength and courage and fell upon the Quraish who began to lose ground. In the end the Quraish were defeated, and the Muslims took some of them as prisoners of war, but did not, as was the custom in those days, treat them unkindly.

It is very interesting to note that in this battle Abu Bakr and his son fought against each other. When, years afterwards, the son became a Muslim, he told his father how he had spared his life on the battle-field, but Abu Bakr said, 'I would not have spared your life if you had fallen into my hands. I love Islam more than I love anything on this earth.'

This reverse at the well of Badr rankled in the minds of the Quraish, and they soon collected an army of three thousand men and marched on Medina to avenge the defeat. The two armies met at Ohud, a few miles from Medina, the Quraish greatly outnumbering the Muslims, who were only seven hundred strong. Ali distinguished himself in this battle and



killed many of the enemy. But a sudden attack from the rear by the Meccans' cavalry commanded by Khalid turned the tables against the Muslims and threw their ranks into disorder. The position of the Muslims was made worse by a false report that Muhammad had been killed. When the Muslims heard this report, they lost heart and might have broken had they not soon learnt that the Prophet was alive.

The Prophet had been badly wounded, but was bravely defended by his devoted followers. At this time some of them suggested that the Prophet should pray to God to destroy their enemies, but the Prophet said, 'How can I do so? I have come to save, not to destroy.' Saying so, he raised his hands in prayer and said, 'O God, the Quraish know not what they do. Lead them into the right path.' The Meccans were at last compelled to retire.

The Quraish were not the only foes of Islam. The Jews also hated the Muslims and resented their growing influence. They concluded an alliance with the Quraish, and together they made a sudden descent upon Medina, this time with an army of ten thousand, under the command of Abu Sufian, the arch enemy of the Prophet. But the Muslims of Medina were not to be taken unawares. They already knew of the evil intention of the Jews, and had made ample preparations. Among other things, they had dug a deep ditch around Medina to protect it from sudden attack. This battle is known as the Battle of the Ditch. The Meccans made many efforts to cross the ditch, but Ali, the fearless warrior, saved every situation. All attempts to storm the fort in which the Muslim women and children had been lodged for safety, failed, because of the valour of Arab women. The bitter cold and lack of sufficient provisions told heavily upon the Meccans, and finally they were

compelled to withdraw. The victory consolidated the power of Muhammad, and resulted in the further spread of Islam.

Nevertheless, Mecca did not come under the influence of Islam, and refused to welcome back the Prophet, although he was now very powerful, and had a very large following. Confident in his strength, he resolved to make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca in the company of his followers. But when he reached Mecca the Quraish would not allow him to enter the city. He, therefore, camped at a place called Hudaibia, one day's march from Mecca. As there was fear of a sudden attack, the Prophet warned his men, and each man, clasping the hand of the Prophet, pledged himself to fight till death. In the meantime, the Prophet sent a message to the Quraish, saying, 'Let the Quraish know that I have not come to fight. My sole object is to make the pilgrimage, and as they have already suffered many losses in previous wars, I think it will be advantageous for them to make peace with us.' Many parleys took place between them, and it was decided to suspend war for ten years. An agreement was also made to the effect that if a Meccan embraced Islam and went to Medina, he would be sent back to Mecca, but if any Muslim went from Medina to Mecca, he would not be sent back. The Quraish did not allow the Prophet to visit Kaaba that year, but agreed to withdraw from Mecca next year for three days, during which time Muhammad and his followers might visit the sacred temple. It was also stipulated that the Muslims should enter Mecca with their swords in sheath, so as to avoid any breach of the peace.

The Muslims did not like the terms of the treaty, but the Prophet counselled patience, and said, 'God Almighty will surely help us.' He was right. The treaty of Hudaibia brought peace between the Muslims and the non-Muslims, and the doctrines of Islam were preached unhindered.



The Prophet took advantage of these years of peace to send missionaries to the remotest corners of Arabia. As a result, Islam spread rapidly. Not content to make converts only in his own country, he also sent embassies to the Roman Emperor, the Persian Emperor, the Governor of Egypt and the King of Abyssinia. Some of these kings received these messengers with much courtesy and gave them patient hearing, but others were indifferent or hostile to the new religion.

The troubles of the Prophet were not yet ended. The Jews of Khaibar, two hundred miles from Medina, were alarmed at the progress of Islam, and disliked the new religion. They incited some of the tribes to carry on war against Muhammad, and aided them by giving them shelter, and in various other ways. The Prophet put up with these activities for some time, and even tried to make peace with the Jews, but they could not understand this and attributed his attitude to weakness, and not to good nature. In the end they went too far and killed some messengers which the Prophet had sent to make peace. This treachery made Muhammad very angry, and he ordered an attack on the city. There were about twenty thousand Jews in the city, and the Muslim soldiers, both on foot and on horse, numbered only sixteen hundred. The Jews laughed at this little army, counting it but a poor little band of men, but they did not realise that it was fired with religious zeal, and was led by Muhammad himself. The Jews proved no match for the Muslims, losing one fort after another. Only one fort offered much resistance, but in the end this too was stormed by Ali, the renowned warrior, and taken. The Jews were defeated, but were left in possession of the city and their lands on payment of rent.

An army was also sent to punish Shurahbeel, the Arab chief of Bostra in Syria, who had killed the messengers

whom the Prophet had sent to him. This army, which numbered three thousand, was commanded by Zaid, the freed slave. This was distasteful to many of the people. 'Why should a man who was once a slave,' they asked one another, 'be chosen in preference to those who are of noble birth?' When the Prophet heard this, he marvelled at their stupidity and short-sightedness. 'It is not birth that matters,' he said to them, 'but worth'. Because a man is of lowly birth he should not be deprived of promotion if he deserves it by merit. Islam will recognise no such artificial distinctions, but will give equal chances to all.' The expedition, however, resulted in disaster for the Muslims who were outnumbered by their enemies.

At that time the Prophet received a complaint from a certain tribe that they had been attacked by the allies of the Quraish. This pained him very much, and he asked the Quraish to make reparations for the people who had been slain or to disown the offending tribe. The Quraish refused to do either and said that they were prepared for war. Thereupon, Muhammad, with an army of more than ten thousand men, advanced on Mecca. The Quraish who were really not in a position to offer any resistance tendered their submission to the conqueror, without a fight, and thus did Mecca receive back the Prophet whom it had previously driven out. The first thing that Muhammad did on entering the city, was to go to the Kaaba, and throw out the many idols which he found there. He also effaced the pictures on the walls of the sacred temple. On this occasion he addressed the people, and said, 'There is only one God, and all men are equal. The nobility of a man depends not on his birth, but on his merits, his conduct and the purity of his life.' He also told them that blood feuds must be abolished, for they led to war.



Mecca, which the Prophet loved so much, thus became the centre of Islam, and Arabia became a country both politically and religiously united. Islam had not only won spiritual supremacy in Arabia, but also political sovereignty, and this conquest had been brought about with very little bloodshed. Muhammad treated the people gently and mercifully, and once strongly rebuked Khalid, now become a Muslim, who had been guilty of an unnecessary act of cruelty. When the Meccans came to him, suing for peace, he asked them, 'What can I give to you who have given me so much trouble?' 'Mercy, good brother,' they cried with one voice. 'You shall have it,' he said with a touch of magnanimity. 'Go to your homes and live as free men.' This gesture of generosity won the hearts of everybody.

Soon after news was brought to him of the turbulence of the Hawazin tribe, who were noted for their bravery and skill in archery. The Muslims marched upon them, but their first attack was repelled. Muhammad then spoke to them such encouraging words that they advanced quickly again to the attack and put the enemy to flight. Many of the Hawazins were taken prisoners, among them being Shaima, daughter of the Prophet's nurse and his foster-sister. Shaima was at that time a matron of seventy years, and proudly told the Muslim soldiers of her relationship with the Prophet, but no one would believe her. When she was brought into the presence of the Prophet, she recalled to him many interesting events of his childhood, which moved the Prophet so much that he paid her the very great honour of spreading his own mantle on the ground for her to sit upon. Afterwards he sent her home and made her many presents of camels, sheep and other things.

This was the last war in which Muhammad took part. By this time most of the people of Arabia had accepted Islam. In spite of early troubles there, he was very fond of

Mecca, and shortly before his death, when he visited the city to perform the Hajj, he delivered his last great message to the Muslims. 'Every Muslim is a brother to his co-religionists,' he said, 'and all Muslims constitute one brotherhood.' He went on to ask them to treat the slaves well, to give them the same food that they themselves ate, and to clothe them with the clothes that they themselves wore. The sincerity of his words brought conviction to all that listened.

Not long after his return to Medina, Muhammad became very ill, and feeling that his end was near, he went to the mosque and there he asked the Muslims, who gathered round him, if he had been unkind or unjust to anybody. He told them that he had never willingly done harm to anyone, neither had he tried to take anything from another by force. If any person thought that he had ever done an unjust thing, he was ready to make amends for it. Only one man stood up from amongst the vast throng assembled there and said, 'You once took three dirhems from me, but I have not yet received them back. Will you please give them to me now?' The Prophet was pleased with these words, and said, I thank you for reminding me of that. You shall be repaid.' Then he passed away peacefully. His body was laid in state, and Abu Bakr delivered the funeral speech and offered prayers over him.

Muhammad was the soul of simplicity and sincerity. He was respected by everyone. He was not ashamed to do the humblest kind of work. He milked his goats, patched his clothes and mended his own shoes. He loved his camel and tended it very carefully. He was good to the poor, and no one ever appealed to him for help in vain.

He was the Emperor of all Arabia, but greatness did not turn his head, and when he went out in the company



of other people, he would not have them follow him at a respectful distance, as servants do with their masters. He would always mix freely with them, as if he were one of them, and avoided everything which might draw attention to himself. He said that he was a humble creature of God, in no way different from his fellow-men.

Wealth and fame and other worldly things held no attractions for him in a world which was, for him, only a temporary resting place. 'I am as a mounted wayfarer who rests at noon under the shade of a tree,' he once said, 'and then proceeds on his way.'

Muhammad was frugal in his habits, and preferred simple food such as dates, barley, wheat, meat and milk. If his host served him with an elaborate meal, he partook of it gladly, but never forgot to remind him politely that he preferred a meal with only one course. His dress was always simple. He did not like to put on silken clothes because he thought they were a sign of effeminacy, and never minded if his garments were patched, so long as they were clean.

The Prophet's relations with his friends are well-known. Amongst his friends he behaved as if he were one of them, and did not allow them to think that he was their superior. Above all he was sincere and kindly in his treatment of others. When he shook hands with any one, there was friendship in the clasp of his hand. He had a smile for everyone and received people in a gracious manner. In the company of his friends he unbent himself, and indulged in innocent jokes. He would never allow an ill word to be spoken of an absent friend, and wished everybody to think well of other. Such conduct on his part ensured for him the friendship and confidence of many people. Abu Bakr would have given up everything that he possessed rather than lose his friendship, so greatly was he attached to him.

Zaid, the slave whom he had freed, was so devoted to him that he preferred to stay with him rather than go away with his father. With many other people, too, he formed the closest and most abiding friendships.

Generosity was the keynote of all his dealings. He was generous in small things as well as great. He never rebuked his servants, even when they had committed an offence. He forgave his enemies readily, for he believed that it was only by forgiveness that a man could win them over. It is said of Muhammad that at his death he prayed to God to forgive one of his enemies, who had spent his whole life plotting to destroy Islam and inciting others to do the same thing. It has been told how the inhabitants of Mecca who had been so bitter towards him, received the most generous treatment at his hands when he finally conquered the city.

He was never known to send away a beggar empty-handed from his door. When he had no money to give, he gave something else, and he often sacrificed his own comfort to provide for others. He regarded it as his duty to feed the hungry and to help the poor, and his sympathy was not for men only but extended also to animals. Once he was told about a man who had drawn water from a well for a thirsty dog at great personal discomfort, and he said that the man would go to heaven for his kindness to an animal in distress. The Arabs have always been noted for their hospitality, and Muhammad was the most hospitable of them all. He was very particular that his guests should have every care, and more often than not, he attended to their comforts himself.

He was the friend and protector of widows and orphans, and found it hard to forgive anyone who had wronged them. He enjoined upon everybody the necessity of taking care of the sick, and regarded it as the duty of every



Muslim to pay his last respects to the dead by attending the funeral.

His reputation for honesty and impartiality was so well-known throughout Arabia that people came to him to have their disputes settled, irrespective of the religion they professed. When it was a case of a dispute between a Jew and a Muslim, neither had any advantage over the other, because of his religion. The people had such great belief in his honesty that he was called 'the trustworthy.'

His courage was always equal to the occasion, and even at the most critical times it never deserted him. Those around him may have been depressed and dejected, but he remained as firm and self-confident as ever. Once, during a journey, he was resting alone under a tree, when one of his enemies came upon him with a drawn sword in his hand. Finding him in this helpless condition, the man beamed with delight and asked him with a sneer, 'Who will save you now?' 'God,' confidently replied the Prophet, without showing any trace of fear or anxiety. The would-be murderer lost his nerve and the sword fell from his hands.

Such was Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam.



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